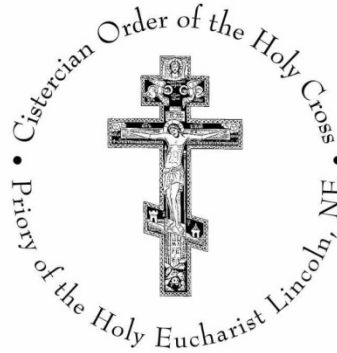
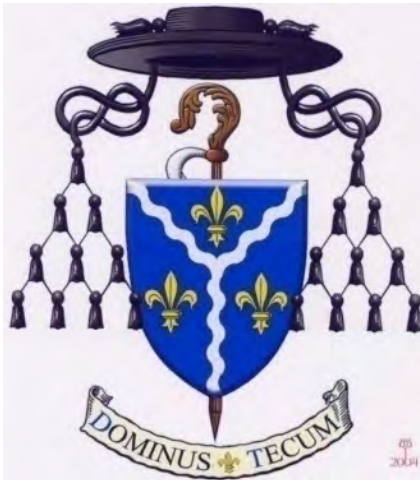


Obsculta

“Listen with the ear of your heart.”



**Forty- one Years
Serving the Lord**



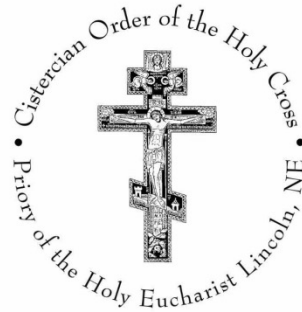
September 2022

“Persevere in prayer. 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



Dear Cistercians, friends, and aspirants:

One fashion or another, we are all seekers. We seek safety, security, love, and community. It is easy enough to know when what seek has been achieved. Seeking a Godly life and doing His perfect seems fraught with confusion and often despair. That need not be the case.

Scripture and tradition are filled with direction. Essentially, God calls each of us to seek perfection and holiness. Unfortunately, we make it difficult to understand and practice because we fill the journey with unrealistic expectations.

Some of us want God to speak directly to us. Others wish to receive a level of peace and certainty. And most want the short easy road to perfection and holiness. Let us use common sense and reason.

Scripture is clear. God wants every one of us to seek perfection and holiness. It is reasonable that He would provide the grace to empower us and a methodology whereby plain folks can achieve the seemingly impossible. We can conclude that our role is to cooperate with God's grace.

We use the Holy Rule of Saint Benedict to aid in developing a lifestyle that sets the stage for our Godly cooperation. We can teach you how to do the same.

This Obsculta, newsletter is your opportunity to meet some of us plain folk. Read the information and listen to the videos. It all makes perfect sense. For more information go to our website. If you want to join, the application is on the website. Blessings.

Religious life is not an extra, not a luxury, not a peculiar path for exceptional souls in the pursuit of Christian perfection.

One doesn't enter the religious state because he is holy but because he wants to become holy.

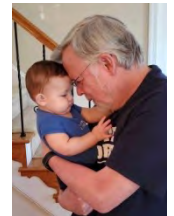
Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery, By Fr. Richard Butler, O.P.



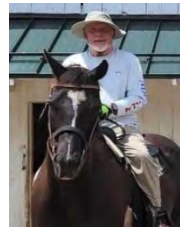
**The Most Rev., Lord Abbot General
Oscar Joseph, M.S., Ph.D., D.S.T., OCCO, OCR, AWP**

**Yes, I have lots of fancy titles, letters after my name,
and even some fancy clothes.
But I prefer my Cistercian habit or a pair of jeans and
to be called simply, Abbot.**

I AM A REAL PERSON



Once I was very young, taught high school and college, I am married and have grandchildren. I was once a top Ultra Trail Runner, got old and become a hiker. I love hiking with my daughter and want to love everyone, young and old.



It is fun being "cool" in my hat and doing the occasional crazy thing like horseback riding and letting my beard go wild.

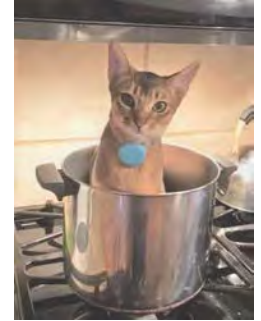
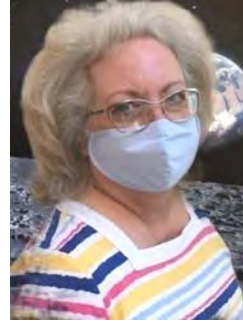
I am fulfilled by my role in the Cistercians. Helping real genuine people come together to fulfill their spiritual dreams is a real joy.

For me, being a monk was a logically practical application of Christ's call to us all, "come follow me." There was no mystery to overcome or the necessity of a divine call specifically given hand-delivered by Gabriel himself. The call to perfection has been given to every Christian.

The only "issue," if there was an issue, was how I was to play this out. I studied the various traditional religious orders. The Rule of St. Benedict found its way into my heart. It was universal, kind to the weak, practical, orderly, and very specific. I liked that.

Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO

Real people



Dr. Kathleen is a retired Child Protective Supervisor, our Marion scholar, member of the Abbot's Council, Volunteer on "We Got Your Back" program, and St. Stephen Harding faculty. She was a contributing editor of an international cook book. Kathleen is married to the Abbot, has an interesting dry sense of humor, loves her cats who are always following her, even into the kitchen.



Father Fletcher from the Old Catholic tradition is one of our confessors. He and his wife have a Santa and Mrs. Claus ministry with a focus on keeping Jesus in the holiday.

Father Ellis, OCCO, is one of our Orthodox monks and one of our confessors. He is married and quite the artist, singer, song writer, and author.

There are two essential notes in a religious vocation: a divine invitation and a human acceptance or response. Because of man's necessary dependence in every motion, however, God not only invites but also moves the subject to respond. He does so without violence to the freedom of human action, in both the natural and the supernatural orders.

Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery, By Fr. Richard Butler, O.P.

Real people



Julie has received the Cistercian's highest honor, "Companions of the Holy Cross". Her husband Lucas is a volunteer for the "We Got Your Back" program. Julie is a teacher, perhaps that is why she loves to point! Lucas has a background in auto mechanics and insurance sales. *Preg* Julie was carrying Liam in her arms and Levi, the baby, in her tummy. Lucas is the best daddy in the land.



Br. Matthew Pius, OCCO is a Prior and parish priest. He is one of the most gifted young men I have ever met. He is a theologian, liturgist, spiritual director, farmer, horseman, gardener, mechanic, artist, and social activist just to name a few of his many talents.

In his Scriptural commentaries, St. Thomas explains the passage in this way: This counsel is given by God to those who ask for it and are willing to work for it. Not all take it because not all have the strength ... not that any have such a strength in themselves, but by a gift of grace.

Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery, By Fr. Richard Butler, O.P.

Real people



Janice, OBL/OCCO, is an Oblate, single grandmother, wine connoisseur, art historian, writes childrens books, and loves to socialize.



Lance is a corporate trustee, on the Abbot's Advisory Council and volunteer for the "We Got Your Back" program. His wife Karen often helps us on social events. Lance has commercially raised chickens They now focus on their grandchildren .

Br. Brendan, OCCO is a Cistercian priest, corporate trustee, and on the Abbot's Advisory Council. He is retired from instructing federal prisoners. He loves to travel and love his pets.

It is not by natural power that this ability to accept the counsel arises; for if one depended on natural power alone, no one could take it. But, says St. Thomas, if this strength is from grace then anyone can; for Christ said: "Ask and it shall be given to you." (Luke 11:9) And so, he concludes, by the grace of God all can take this counsel. For God is ready to give the grace of response to those who want it. And a generous soul, sincere in his intentions, can proceed unafraid.

Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery, By Fr. Richard Butler, O.P.

Real people



Michelle is a member of the Abbot's Advisory Council, our translator, and a school teacher. She loves to run races including marathons. Her husband is an ex-marine and Active Iron Man. Together they have inspired the children to be champions in several sports including running. Michelle loves animals and often takes her dog hiking with her.

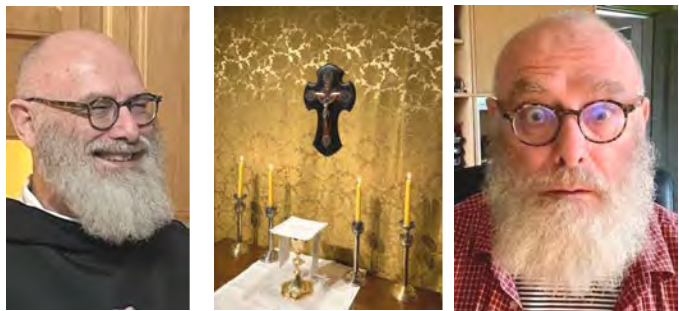


Allen is a Cistercian Postulant and a Lutheran minister. Allen and his wife have overcome nearly everything one could imagine. Additionally they have a long history of helping the disabled, and ministering to the most difficult. Their marital love for each other is a model for us all.

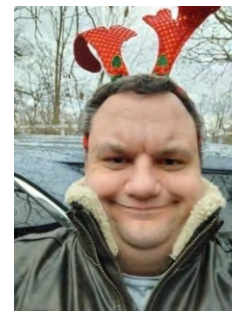
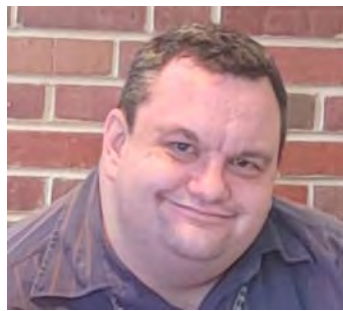
Ordinarily, however, the movement of grace in religious vocation is neither rare nor exceptional. With remarkable brevity, St. Thomas refers to this act of acceptance as *propositum religionis*, the simple resolve to enter religion, or the religious state. This is an act of the will, a deliberate choice and resolution, consequent upon intellectual consideration of the object willed.

Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery, By Fr. Richard Butler, O.P.

Real people



Br. Raphael, OCCO is a Cistercian hermit priest. He is a retired college professor, avid fisherman, and is developing a rather mystical life style.



Brian is an Oblate, married, Roman Catholic, licensed Spiritual Director, and works as a cyber security expert. He enjoys his pets, family life, and humor.



Br. Columcille, OCCO is a Cistercian priest and assists the Abbot with research projects. His military service resulted in a long list of disabilities. He lives with his parents to produce a Trinity of support.



Jay, OBL/OCCO, is a Cistercian Oblate Jay is a volunteer in the "We Got Your Back" program. He and his wife are devout Baptists. They play in a number of local bands,

The sincere disposition of the faithful Christian, cooperating with the daily graces offered him, can prepare for that series of graces which culminate in the vows of religion. While the gift of perseverance in the religious state is likewise a gift from God, it is the ordinary fulfillment of all that has preceded if the religious does not oppose the graces of his state. St. Thomas says, "Those whom God chooses for something, He prepares and disposes so that they will be found fit for that for which they are selected."

Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery, By Fr. Richard Butler, O.P.

Real people

Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church in México.

Prior Daniel, OCCO, (Bishop)
Br. Konstantin, OCCO, (Priest)
Br. Vlad, OCCO, (Priest)



We are very honored to have these incredible men as a part of our Cistercian family. They are loved and respected by their local community and have a worldwide ministry focused on the health of the individual's mind, body, and soul. We have done some major projects together very successfully.

Essentially what is required is a sincere and deliberate resolve to seek perfection in charity through the religious state of life, according to the rule and constitutions of a certain religious institute.

The indispensable natural virtues required, according to Father Philippe, are: a right conscience, a profoundly honest character, sincerity and sociability. The required religious virtues are: true piety, docility for direction, a spirit of penance to accept the renunciations required, the practice of chastity, and true devotion to a way of life dedicated to the service of neighbor for the love of God

Religious Vocation: An Unnecessary Mystery, By Fr. Richard Butler, O.P.

Dear Aspirant:

You have met some of our leaders and members on the previous pages. You saw that they are authentic, genuine people with real lives. They, like yourself, have not come to us with a perfect past, yet they sincerely wished to move toward perfection and to become holy. With our encouragement and following the Rule of St. Benedict, each has done so in their unique way.

They celebrate a simpler, less stressed life with more blessings from our God Lord. This life can be yours as well.

The list below describes your options. The YouTube links will give you more information, and the following pages will briefly describe our outstanding Religious Order.

Once you have read the Obsculta carefully, I would encourage you to visit our website for more information and to complete the application for your next step. Blessings to you.

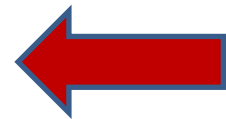
- 1. Consecrating to a religious life and live outside of a community. (Living your life at home with a loving family and good employment can make becoming a monk easier than living in a monastery.)**
- 2. Third order oblate program. (There is less required with this option. You can begin here if you like and move up to monk formation later.)**
- 3. Supporting men with a call to the diaconate and priesthood through ordination, or incardination. (Men, single or married can be ordained. Ask the Abbot for more information.)**
- 4 Associates: Religious communities (residential or dispersed), jurisdictions, parishes, small or home based communities, or individual(s) who desire to be under our Abbatial and Episcopal oversight and be autonomous. (Visitors) Requirements can be flexible and dependent upon a group's or an individual's application.**



<https://youtube.com/shorts/VHGkyyT5d>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y28MRtRBx8o>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEgDX7eh1xQ>



Do you have enough courage and charity? Do you trust that God will provide for your lack?



Over the past twenty-five years God has spoken to me directly and often regarding the Cistercians.

He has always been encouraging.

His grace has sustained us.

Below our Good Lord describes what He wants us to be.

“We, The Cistercians of the Holy Cross, are embedded icons, living sacramentals; who sustain, grace, and hold together the fiber of our communities. Our martyrdom is conversatio, stability, and obedience.

We live in and are influenced by the heretic nature of our culture. However, while clothed in our holy habits we become sacred icons. When people gaze upon us they look into their hope and see reflected back the Source of all Hope. We become sacred signs, living sacramentals.

The Pax of our contemplative lives provides the necessary stillness to speak without words. The rhythm of ora et labora and the earnestness of our vows are our martyr’s cross.

Persevere in prayer. 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.”





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.



Continues on the following page

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 have made it their true spiritual home. Amen

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





Spiritual Joy

How to live and maintain a joy filled prayer life.

By Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO



A short video series

Welcome to the Cistercian Order

What is a Monk?

Where do we go from here?

(How to Maintain a Prayerful Life)

The Rule of St. Benedict

Habit of Prayers

Protecting your vocation

Perfectionism

(Gold Medal Monk)

Lectio Divina

(Praying the Scriptures)

Building Courage and Charity through Humility

Stability

Obedience

Conversatio

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9316848>

https://youtube.com/channel/UC8n9vm_1zLZ72ylj2RoH2Vg

From The Abbot:

Rather than list the qualities of the Cistercian Charism and discuss what we can do for you I am listing below some comments from members on what we have done for them.

“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.”

“The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross serves God in a variety of ministries throughout the world. Our union with each other, developed through common prayer also unites us to Jesus Christ, whom we ultimately serve with joy.”

“There were certain things that prayer, study, and scriptural research have convinced me are required in my own path. It was important for me that the order be contemplative, and that it adhered to the traditional orthodox teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I was not interested in joining an order that was too easy, or that bent over too far to be politically amenable. It was important to me that I would be well guided along the way.”

“Indeed, our affiliation with the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross has brought tremendous spiritual blessings to us and our dear ones. The Cistercian habit has become an effective and visible sign of the healing and reconciling presence of our Lord Jesus.”

“When I joined the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, the first thing that changed was my prayer life. Before, it was a life-less obligation, a burden my wife and I committed ourselves to pray at least the Morning and Evening Prayers and whenever time allows, to pray the other offices as well. This helped us to become more prayerful, teaching us to offer everything to God each day; referring to Him even the mundane things of our daily life. I started seeing myself opening more and more to my wife in terms of communication, becoming more forgiving and affirming. My relationship with the Lord started improving tremendously. Whereas before, obeying God is a duty, now it is a joy.”

Suspicious Signs of a Call to Contemplative Religious Life

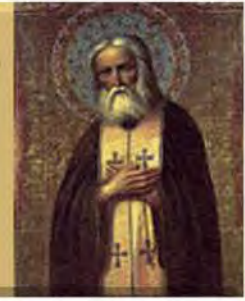
**Desire to grow in union with God through prayer. Love of God that manifests itself in a desire to give one’s life to Him. Desire to live simply. The wish to live life with less stress and more order. Generosity. Ability to listen to others and accept direction when needed. Desire to worship God
In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



The St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary

and

The St. Seraphim School of Orthodox Theology



St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary

welcomes students to a wide variety of degrees, programs, and continuing educational opportunities.

Check our section at the Cistercian website or www.StephenHarding.College for more information and Application.

*Off Campus Study Programs, Something for Everyone
Students may enroll at any time.*

**You choose the Programs and Courses that best meet
Your goals.**

**Continuing Education, CE
Certificate of Studies and Advanced Studies, CS/CAS.
Bachelor of Theology, Th.B.
Master of Theology, Th.M.
Doctor of Theology, Th.D.
Honorary Doctorates D.D. or LL.D.**

**Saint Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary
is a Religious Order affiliated educational institution under
the authority of The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, a 501
non-profit corporation. Our degrees are classified as
ecclesiastically accredited.**

“Indeed, it has been a great, fruitful experience to have studied at St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary. I had finally attained one of my dreams, to have a theology doctorate, and I had done it thanks to the guidance and encouragement of the Abbot.”

“A wonderful by-product of education at St. Stephen Harding is the relationship one can develop with the personalized focus. Frankly, I want to continue studying as a result and that’s the best compliment I can offer anyone involved with St. Stephen Harding, or any student considering the pursuit of a degree. Bravo! Rev Oscar Joseph, may God continue to bless your endeavors and seminary – they have certainly blessed me!”

“I am lead to boast about the education received as well as ‘free’ insight offered from the Abbot. I must admit, I wasn’t sure I could pull this off – a Master’s degree while juggling so many other things in life, but thanks to his gentle, always humorous guidance, I was able to realize a long term ambition.”



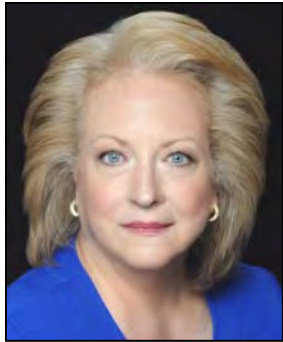
The “We Got Your Back Program” was inspired by Br. Benedict, OCCO.

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



These are Your Volunteers



The Cistercians honor their members and friends in a number of ways.

Honorary Doctoral Degrees

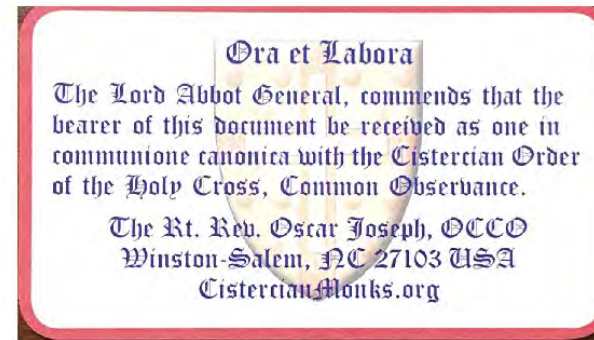
St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary offer these degrees for the purpose of rewarding or advancing outstanding persons. Honorary degrees may be awarded to a person deserving of honor by virtue of scholarly distinction, noteworthy public service, or significant contribution to the church at large.

The Companions of the Holy Cross *Comites Sancti Crucis*

Is a medium for The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, Common Observance to give their highest honor to those individuals who demonstrate extraordinary love for the Holy Cross through outstanding qualities of character.

If you are interested in receiving our blessings please contact Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO for more information.

Sacred membership cards that have an Apostolic Blessing



This Identification card celebrates and honors your association with the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross. Whether you are a life vowed member or a valued friend of the Order please know that I embrace each of you and dispense upon you the riches of the Lord's blessings.

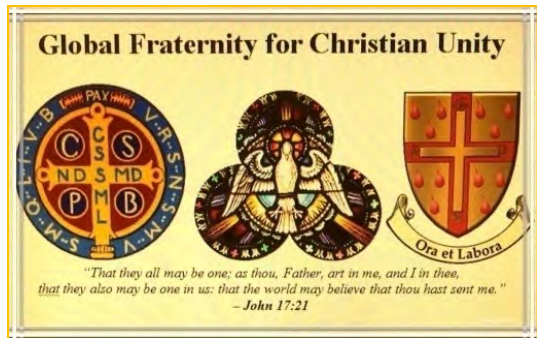
I pray that this document will remind you of our shared life of prayer, work, and that you are in a communion of persons who celebrate a common faith and discipline, The Rule of St. Benedict.

I further authorize The Cistercian Order's vowed and promised members to honor their valued friends who have shown such affection for our work with this same sign of communion.

I have blessed this document with Holy Water and my Apostolic Blessing thus making it a sacred source of grace for you and reception of St. Benedict's protection.

The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross sponsors two Facebook Groups. Each group consists of 700+ active members. The groups are closely monitored to stay mission focused.

We invite you and your friends to participate.



This group offers a private forum for MEMBERS ONLY In order to provide a venue of encouragement for continued spiritual formation of individuals and groups invested in the discipline of prayer in a safe environment free of criticism.

We are encouraged to develop personal prayer lives for the purpose of spiritual personal and corporate growth in unity with God and each other.

For more information about The Global Fraternity for Christian Unity please go to CistercianMonks.org. and click the link to the Global Fraternity.

This is a one of a kind program for Christian Unity.



Prayer For Intentions/Global Fraternity of Christian Unity

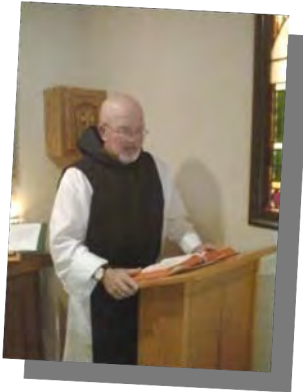
An online ministry of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross.

Prayers for sincerely personal needs. This group has a supportive family environment. Where "strangers" sincerely pray and give support.

I cannot compliment this group enough. If you need prayer or wish to be a prayer partner with others please join.

Both groups have ministered for over five years.

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.

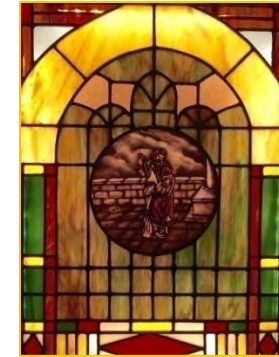
- While there are traditional qualifications for ordination/incardination, the principal interest is discerning a true vocation and developing Priests or Deacons who are fruitful ministers. Therefore, educational requirements may be individually tailored.

- 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.

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.

- 1. Consecrating to a religious life and live outside of a community*
- 2. Third order oblate program.*
- 3. Supporting men with a call to the diaconate and priesthood through ordination, or incardination*
- 4 Associates: Religious communities (residential or dispersed), jurisdictions, parishes, small or home based communities. or individual(s) who desire to be under our Abbatial and Episcopal oversight and be autonomous. (Visitors) Requirements can be flexible and dependent upon a group's or an individual's application.*

“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.”

One doesn't enter the religious state because he is holy but because he wants to become holy.

*For more information contact
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