

**Forty-three Years  
Serving the Lord**



# Obsculta

"Listen with the ear of your heart."



**March 2024**

Special Edition

**"Persevere in prayer. Gratitude will open our souls  
to the unity of God, self, and others."**

Special Edition

The quarterly newsletter of  
The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, Common Observance  
*Worldwide Membership of Monks Living Outside of a Monastery*

Founded 1981

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[www.CistercianMonks.org](http://www.CistercianMonks.org)

**CONVOCATION at St. Francis Springs Prayer Center, NC, 2/6-9/2024**

## Our Abbot General speaks about the Convocation



In the **Rule of Saint Benedict**, community life is central. Whether living in a physical monastery or as part of a “monastery without walls,” the disciple is reminded that they are part of a community. Here are three aspects of community emphasized by St. Benedict:

**1. Prayer:** Benedict teaches that everything occurs within the context of community. Whether praying alone or with others, the disciple is united to the larger community. The Rule encourages specific periods for prayerful reading and emphasizes the importance of a balanced lifestyle that includes both manual labor and prayer.

**2. Relationships:** The qualities that contribute to a valued life—such as humility, patience, simplicity, and caring for others—are integral to community living. St. Benedict’s framework provides meaning for those seeking to live out their faith in the world today.

**3. Work:** Benedictine community members have specified periods for manual labor. Moderation is considered “the mother of all virtues.” The Rule emphasizes mutual service, especially in the mundane aspects of everyday life, without expecting individual rewards.

In summary, St. Benedict’s teachings emphasize the value of life in community, where prayer, relationships, and work are interconnected and contribute to a balanced and purposeful existence.

I witnessed at the Convocation that everyone eagerly participated in the community event. I saw humble service in community prayer, praying for each other, teaching lessons, leading and participating in choir, altar service, privately comforting and inspiring others, setting up chairs, serving each other at table and hundreds of other acts of service.

Although we are a dispersed group that does not take away from a true sense of community.





**Br Raphael Foshay, Ph.D., M.Th., OCCO+  
Chaplain, Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross**

In 2018, I retired as Emeritus Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, Athabasca University (Canada's Open University).

Several months into retirement I realized that it was not a half-completed book project that needed completion but my earlier attempt at a monastic vocation (4 years an Orthodox monk and 2 years a Benedictine).

It took me several years of prayer and reflection to perceive how I could best achieve this goal given my advanced age.

My life had in the process become increasingly reclusive and I began to see that a hermit's life in the world might be a solution.

Not long after this, I discovered the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross and contacted Abbot Oscar Joseph.

In October of 2021 (in the midst of Covid) I flew from my home in the Nova Scotia countryside to North Carolina, where the Abbot received my solemn vows and ordained me to the diaconate and the priesthood.

In January of 2024, I completed my M.Th. studies in time to receive my degree at the Convocation in early February and accept the role of Chaplain to the OCCO.

With immense gratitude I feel God's hand on my life, guiding me into a deeper walk with him.

I extend gratitude also to the OCCO for its very existence and to Abbot Oscar Joseph for his understanding and guidance.



# The Gathering Room

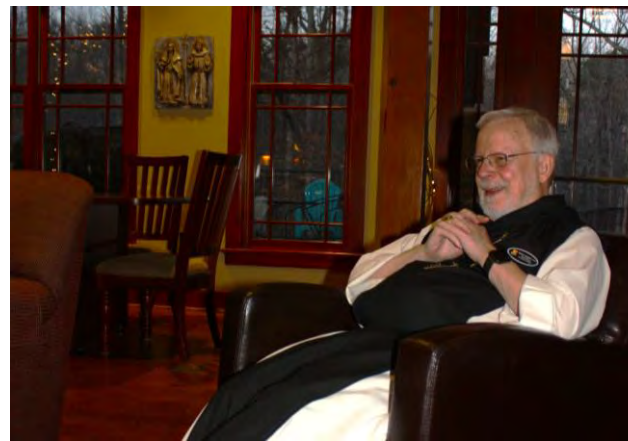
Our first gathering was led by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO.

He helped us to share an interesting story about ourselves followed by the greeting of Benedict/Benedictus. Before long we received a wonderful gift of blessed anointing balm that we used to pray with each other.

That was a wonderful vehicle to fire a strong flame of community.

It was an exhausting day of travel, registration, dinner, and social event but we all settled in our separate rooms with a grace filled hearts and big smiles.

Throughout the Convocation we had encouraging moments of prayer and discussions. Every evening celebrated a social event.





**Trustee Lance received a Certificate of Appreciation for his service to the Order.**



**Oblate Linda lead the Choir.**



**Oblate Joy taught us about Visual Divina.**



**Oblate/Trustee Jay taught us about Mysticism.**



**Abbot General Oscar Joseph showed us how to overcome spiritual obstacles.**





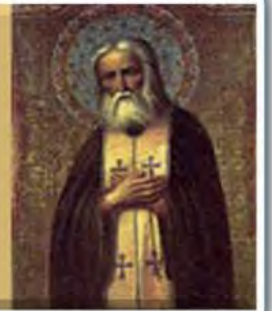
Chaplain Raphael, OCCO+  
received an earned  
Masters in Theology



Bishop Rob Lyons  
received an Honorary  
Doctor of Divinity in  
recognition of his  
sacrificial giving to the  
Church.



*The St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary*  
and  
*The St. Seraphim School of Orthodox Theology*



The Cistercian of the Holy Cross  
directs two College/Seminaries.

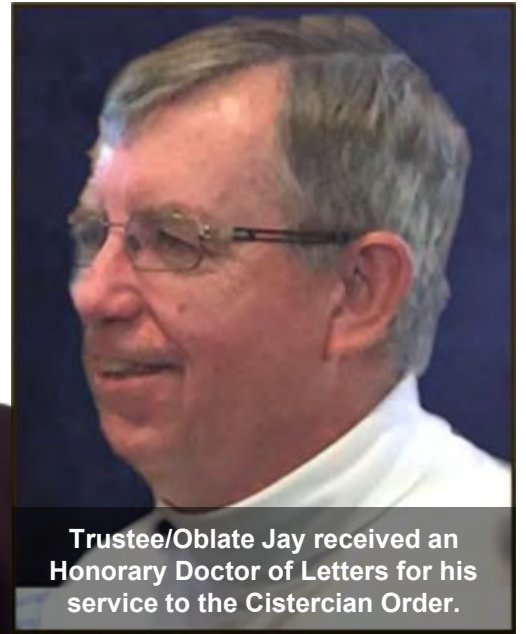
St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary awarded degrees to these wonderful people



Council Member Michelle received an  
Honorary Doctor of Letters for her 20+  
years of educating the disadvantaged.



Abbot/Bishop Dan received an Honorary  
Doctor of Divinity in recognition of his  
sacrificial giving to the Church.



Trustee/Oblate Jay received an  
Honorary Doctor of Letters for his  
service to the Cistercian Order.



**The Chapel at St. Francis Springs  
Prayer Center designed for us.  
Where we prayed throughout the  
day and for two Holy Eucharists.**







## Oblate Linda, The Director of the best Choir ever.

*With only a few hours of practice  
a group of "strangers" came  
together and produced a long list  
of songs sounding like angels  
praising our Good Lord.*







## **Rev. Br Raphael Foshay, M.Th., Ph.D., OCCO Chaplain**

Others, I know, will speak to the great success of the Convocation in its main purpose, the consecration of Abbot Dan Nobles to the episcopate. It was a memorable liturgical celebration, planned and presided over by Abbot Oscar Joseph and enhanced by the volunteer choir and accompaniment of willing attendees at the event, whether the friends of Abbot Dan's Benedictine Mission or of the OCCO.

I arrived at the last minute, the result of a severe winter storm in my home province of Nova Scotia, and was present, for that reason, for less than 48 hours. But the experience stands out in my mind as one of those magical events that is surrounded by a halo, giving it unique qualities like few others that fix themselves in memory.

Both the times of prayer, liturgical and personal, and the social encounters at meals and other moments had a unique quality of genuine openness and spontaneous warmth.

But, more than this, the Convocation was a rare opportunity to experience the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross as a community not only of "common observance" but of "observance in common." It performed something that ordinarily remains virtual in our solitary and dispersed lives as monks, clerics and oblates.

We do not get to be in the same room, in the same common prayer, with our brothers and sisters and our Abbot. All of us, no doubt, understand that this dispersion makes something possible for each of us that is priceless, necessary to our lives, and indeed to our salvation, our redemption, and to our day to day lives of prayer and service.

But the common purpose that all of us gain and relish comes with the hard work, the asceticism, of solitary struggle in our chosen circumstances. We are each of us alone, but it is important that we not be lonely, that we do not feel disconnected from our brothers and sisters with whom we share this Cistercian tradition of love for God and for the struggling world.

The Convocation helped me enormously to appreciate that we are an Order of likeminded people, a community, a brother/sisterhood of prayer and adoration of the God who made us.

**Jan Van Nostrand M.B.A., LITT.D.**

**Oblate/Mentor/ Trustee**



*The Abbot writes:*

*I was labored by several medical conditions during the eight months of preparation for the Convocation and consequently not at my best. Jay was my hero and stood in for me several times. I am very grateful for his heroic efforts.*

I had the privilege of assisting our Abbot Oscar Joseph in planning the February convocation. It was very gratifying to me to see it come together in real time.

Especially noteworthy was how quickly a sense of community emerged even though very few of us had met in person prior to the event. I believe that was a testimony to the power of our shared charism and how our individual commitments to Stability, Obedience and Conversatio prepared common ground before any of us set foot in the retreat center.

It was also a joy to me to be able to share some of my thoughts on genuine mysticism and my experiences in putting our Cistercian principles into practice in my Baptist congregation.

Leading up to my talk on Wednesday afternoon several of the attendees reached out to me to express keen interest, to offer support and, most meaningfully, to pray for me and for what I'm doing. Being touched in those ways reassured me that I what I was doing was meaningful and valuable.

The most spiritual times were the worship events Wednesday evening and Thursday afternoon. I was deeply moved and uplifted by God's presence and to sense His Spirit moving among us during those services and ceremonies in the Chapel at St. Francis Springs, a much larger space. I was truly blessed to be there and I'm entirely confident that everyone else who was there feels the same.

My purposes in being part of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross are to grow closer to God and to learn how to be more like Him.

I've come away from the Convocation with a better understanding of our Order and a renewed commitment to my own spiritual formation and to using its teaching and tools with those around me.



## Linda Ebersole, Oblate



As I reflect on our time together and on making my promises, my heart is full, satisfied with goodness of God. His riches are inexhaustible. I am thankful for the fellowship of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, for our company of sojourners, and for the shepherds who watch for us. Our joy is but a shadow of good things to come in the Kingdom of God.

*The Abbot writes:*

*Linda was a hero in putting together the music that I gave her. She and her husband were a joy to work with. It was an honor to receive her Oblate promises at the Convocation.*

Convocation 2024 was a wonderful experience for me.

I met many new friends from various parts of the country and enjoyed getting to know each very special person.

There is just something precious about Christian fellowship; we bonded easily and well, as we shared our love for the Lord and our desire to focus on Him and all He means to each one of us.

What a blessing to have had several days to focus on God alone, apart from distractions. I hope we can be together again.

Seeds were planted during our time together.

People who were assigned to the choir shared in the ministry of music. You all led well and applied yourselves diligently to the task at hand. I am so delighted to have served with you! We labored together and brought forth something of great beauty in worship. I was privileged to lead you.

As you resume your daily life at home, I hope you share the memory I have of a job well done. I'll say it again: Well, done! Several times I said to you that you should keep singing for the Lord, so here I am, saying it again!

I know you are not surprised to read that I hope you will allow the seeds we planted to grow in your life. May you always have a song in your heart.

Our lives at home are challenging. I hope the joy we experienced together went home with you and that you are meeting life's demands with grace and trust in the Lord.

I am thankful for the tools we were given to continue our journeys as we disperse to our many locations and responsibilities.

May God bless all of you richly in all you do in service for Him.

## Lance Key Trustee

### Greetings

I arrived on Wednesday morning at St Francis and to be honest I really didn't know what to expect.

It didn't take long to see that St Francis is a Holy Place steeped in faith and welcoming to all those who are seeking a closer walk with God. The atmosphere was centered around worship and prayer. The grounds were beautiful and tranquil. Everywhere you looked you could see the handiwork of God.

When I entered the complex, I was greeted by the presence of God; with people in silent prayer and communion with the Father. That's just what I needed.

My responsibility there was to be part of the choir where I met new friends that I learned to love as brothers and sisters in Christ. The music was well thought out and appropriate for the blessed occasion.

In the afternoon I attended a teaching given by Abbot Oscar Joseph who presided over us. His depth and knowledge is surpassed only by his wisdom.

He also conducted the two ceremonies with holiness and represented St Benedict with passion and humility.

To all those precious people I met I want you all to know you will not find a more Godly Religious Order than the Cistercians and a more dedicated Abbot than Abbot Oscar Joseph.

God bless all of you and know my prayers are with you.







By Janice Joy Ariza, Obl., OCCO

## Looking Back at The Convocation

As I flew home to Washington after the Convocation, living the monastic life was on my mind. The theme of “Set the Captives Free” had taken on a different meaning during those few days at the retreat center. Many people look at religious life as a prison of sorts. Having to be confined to the interior of the monastery and following a schedule of prayers and meals might seem anything but freeing. My experience proved to be one of appreciating the rhythm of the daily life with others who love God and want to serve Him.

The St. Francis Retreat Center was serene and welcoming. Its very presence spoke of stability and balance and the attendees of the Cistercian Order were friendly -- ready to work and pray. The work included setting up the meeting space, planning our presentations and preparing for our various duties during the Consecration of Abbot Dan.

I participated in the choir which turned out to be a wonderful experience of learning and collaborating. Others attended the altar, took photos, printed materials, along with other duties, but most importantly we all worshipped and prayed together throughout our stay.

When my plane touched down in Seattle, I sensed that the time spent away would be a deepening of my interior life as a believer in Christ. My perspective on freedom was that we all gathered together individually but with one goal.

*“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.”*

# Meet our dear friend, Rt. Rev. Abbot Dan Nobles



**Abbot Dan Nobles** was elected and installed as Abbot of Christ Mission Anglican Benedictines in June 2019. Abbot Dan was ordained as a Priest serving the Anglican Communion after completing more than 30 years of military service and retiring as a Colonel in the US Army.

He completed his seminary education through Trinity Theological Seminary, earning a doctorate in Theological Leadership. He began his monastic journey as an Oblate and pursued vowed Religious Life. Prior to his election, Abbot Dan served the Order as Dean of Monastic Formation.

A little more about me; I grew up in rural Alabama, the youngest of six boys. Inheriting values of faith and service toothers from my parents. Connie and I met in Kansas. We married and raised two daughters. Today, 43 years later, we enjoy 7 grandchildren.

Retired from the Army, I entered seminary and earned a PhD, studying the stresses faced by Christian leaders and ways of promoting their wellbeing.

Seeking a different path of spiritual growth, I discovered the Order of St. Benedict, and found a community of faithful disciples who seek to be with our Lord more than trying to do Christianity. Sounds strange, doesn't it?

As I learned to pray contemplatively, it was as if my second lung began to breathe. My life became less hectic, and my soul found peace.

To me, monastic spirituality is being with God in community. As we serve others, we realize that God is serving through us. My advice to others - seek to be with God rather than insisting on doing for God. As He fills you with Himself, He will do mighty things around (and sometimes through) you.



## Meet our outstanding Consecrating Bishops



**Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO**, is a Cistercian bishop and the head of his order for a quarter of a century. He holds a M.S. in Education, doctorates in Sacred Theology (Scripture) and Christian Counseling, and several honorary degrees. He is also a writer, teacher, counselor, spiritual guide, healer, and media personality.

He became a priest in 1993 and worked as a pastor of a local conservative Anglican Church. He taught various subjects at community colleges. He established the St. Matthew's Institute for Healing and Intention Growth, a counseling center, and the St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary. He has authored several books on spirituality, such as *Memoirs of a Christian Healer*, *The Joy of Spiritual Freedom*, and *Listen with the Ear of Your Heart*.

He has been a prominent figure in the Benedictine movement in the US and has offered spiritual direction and healing services to hundreds of people for over three decades. He has been on TV and radio shows to share his wisdom and stories. He retired from his counseling practice in 2019 and now focuses on his duties with Cistercian Order and leading healing services, retreats, and seminars.



**Scott McLaughlin** is the retired Metropolitan Archbishop of the Orthodox Anglican Communion, a global network of national churches of about 1.5 million members. He holds a B.A in Biblical Studies, an M.A. in Church Administration, and a D.Min. in Pastoral Theology. Beginning his service to the Lord in 1981 as a Baptist pastor, he was “converted” to the Catholic expression of the faith as an Anglican in 1984. He was consecrated to the Episcopacy in 1999. During his episcopacy, he oversaw the formation of 22 new parishes in the United States and began new national churches in Ghana and Italy. He served as President of St. Andrew's Theological Collage and Seminary in the USA, and established seminaries for theological education of Anglican clergy in Europe, Africa, and Asia. In 2009, he authorized the formation of the Orthodox Anglican Society of St. Francis and became a brother in the Society. He has authored and edited texts for theological education and liturgy, including *Orthodox Anglican Principles*, *Special Introduction to the Old Testament*, *An Anthology of Readings for the Study of the Holy Order of the Church*, *The Franciscan Daily Office and the Little Brothers' and Sisters' Book of Praise and Prayer*. . In 2018, McLaughlin founded the Church of Universal Compassion, and has just completed the liturgy for this jurisdiction of the Church, *Ascension: The Prayers and Sacraments of the Church of Universal Compassion*.

## Meet our outstanding Consecrating Bishops



**Peter Brewer COS** is the bishop and Minister-General of the Community of Our Saviour, an Anglo-Catholic religious order. He holds a BA in Economics and is a graduate of both the USAF Staff and Command School and the USAF Reserve Forces School. Bishop Brewer retired from the US Air Force as a Lieutenant Colonel. He studied at the University of the South and at the University of London School of Theology. He has a M.Div. from Holy Trinity College and Seminary, 1991. He has served various parishes in both the Southern Episcopal Church and in the Anglican Province of America as well as being a Hospice and a Hospital Chaplain. Bishop Brewer was consecrated as Suffragan Bishop, Diocese of the South, Southern Episcopal Church in 1992 and later consecrated (sub-conditione) as the Suffragan Bishop, Diocese of the Eastern U.S., Anglican Province of America in 2003, retiring as Suffragan in 2010.





## 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  
[Abbot@bellsouth.net](mailto:Abbot@bellsouth.net)*