

Obsculta

"Listen with the ear of your heart."

June 2025



**"We, are embedded icons,
living sacramentals; who sustain, grace,
and hold together the fiber of our communities."**

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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“ We are embedded icons, living sacramentals; who sustain, grace, and hold together the fiber of our communities.”



++Isacc Simon, OCCO
Abbot General

WHAT KIND OF MAN AN ABBOT OUGHT TO BE

In Chapter Two of the Rule of St. Benedict, he addresses the requirements of being an Abbot. I am particularly struck by this quote:

“...and to know that to whom more is committed from him is more required; and let him know how difficult and arduous a matter he has undertaken, namely, to govern souls and to adapt himself to many dispositions.”

Having been elected as the next Abbot General of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, I find myself wondering how God will see me through the tenure of this daunting office. Yet, I have submitted myself to the will of God. I shall endeavor to follow the voice of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters of our Order, I am blessed to have received your vote of confidence as the next Abbot General. I do not presume to have all the answers or “know-how” for such an office. But I will strive to prayerfully, faithfully, and sincerely do the work God has called me to do, at this moment in time.

I pray that God be glorified by our work as Cistercians. I pray that we continue as living icons who grow in grace and holiness all the days of our lives. And I pray we grow closer in bonds of love and Christian fellowship as a Cistercian family.

Be blessed!

Our new Abbot General, Bishop Isacc Simon, OCCO tells us about himself.

Cuyahoga Community College - Associate of Applied Science in Nursing - May 2010

Cleveland State University - Bachelor of Arts in Psychology - September 1995

St Paul Bible Institute and Seminary -Master of Biblical Theology June 2021

St Paul Bible Institute and Seminary - Doctor of Biblical Theology July 2022

I have been blessed to walk with others on their spiritual journey, as they sought the Lord God Almighty. I have performed weddings, funerals, house blessings, baptisms, confirmations, ordinations, and consecrations.

I have helped others discern whether they truly have been called into ordained ministry. I have provided spiritual direction, visited the sick, been a volunteer hospital chaplain, celebrated the Eucharist weekly, taught bible study, and provided biblical counseling.

As my faith deepened, I began to realize that I needed greater spiritual awareness, to hear God's voice more clearly. This need led me to explore a dispersed religious life. The myriad examples of individuals who "thrived" as religious aligned with my need for greater spiritual awareness.

Ultimately, this journey brought me to the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, Common Observance. Here I was inculcated in the way of Benedict (as reformed by the Cistercian movement). Entering making vows to God, Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO and the Order helped me achieve that greater spiritual connection, I was desperate to find.

These several years later, I am thrilled to call myself a Cistercian. I am overjoyed at what living the religious life has helped my life to become. I earnestly believe I am several steps closer to God. I believe God has called me as a laborer in His vineyard. Indeed, the harvest is plentiful,



**++Isacc Simon, OCCO
Abbot General**



We created four amazing short videos with AI assisted songs.

Isacc Simon, OCCO is being endorsed by our leaders.

Abbot General Isacc Simon, OCCO is thanking everyone for their vote.



<https://youtube.com/shorts/9GL5orH8fUw?feature=shared>

<https://youtube.com/shorts/zGa-b79VomQ?feature=shared>



The Cistercians are welcoming Abbot General Isacc Simon, OCCO.

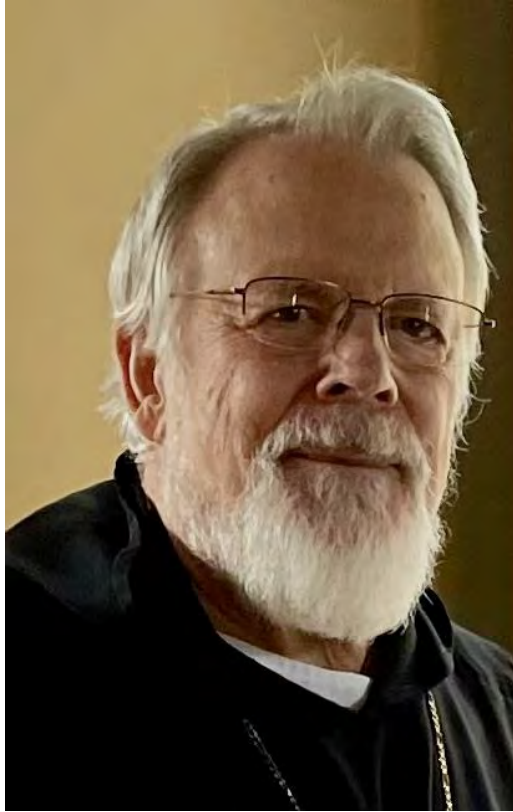
The Cistercians are thanking Abbot Oscar Joseph for his twenty-eight years of service.

An Abbot General for 28 years
A Bishop for 26 years



<https://youtube.com/shorts/aSODv-CxVRg?feature=shared>

<https://youtube.com/shorts/zd6UdpvTdMc?feature=shared>



Dear friends and fellow Cistercians,

As I reflect on the past twenty-eight years of dedicated work within our Cistercian community, I am filled with immense gratitude for each of your contributions that have made this journey truly remarkable. I am prepared to embark on a new chapter in my life and excited for what lies ahead.

I want to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you for your unwavering support and commitment throughout the years. Your dedication has provided me with endless joy and purpose, and I am proud to have had the privilege of working alongside such outstanding individuals.

I am confident that ++ Isaac Simon, OCCO, Abbot General, will lead us with the wisdom and compassion necessary to guide our community on a positive and holy path.

Thank you once again for everything you have done. May our Cistercian community continue to flourish under the leadership of Bishop Isaac Simon, OCCO, our next Abbot General.

With deep appreciation,

Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO, Ph.D., D.S.T., OCR



From we to thee



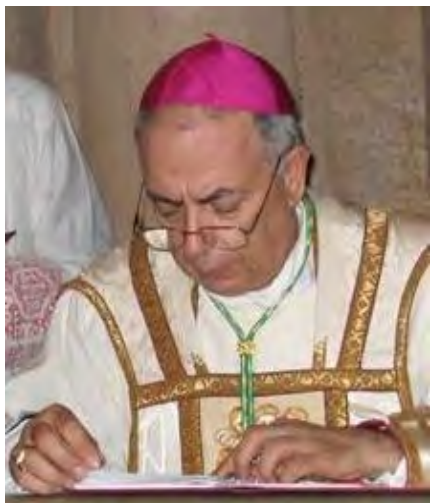
It's finally time for me to pass on my mantle to Bishop Isaac Simon.

For twenty-eight years my wife Dr. Kathleen and I have dedicated ourselves to the Cistercians.

Doctor Kathleen has demonstrated remarkable selflessness and sacrifice for the betterment of our community and the sacred mission of the Order. Her unwavering dedication and tireless efforts have left a lasting impact. I cannot begin to describe the hundreds of hours she and I discussed, sometimes with tears, what we need to do next for the Cistercians. I might change the old adage to: "beside every successful husband stands his bold wife." I am forever grateful for her contributions.

When we began the Order stood on shaky grounds with uncertain prospects. She and I transformed those fragile foundations into a solid rock upon which the order now stands.

We want to thank the countless people who have contributed to our sanity and the strength of the Order.



Your Excellency Archbishop and General Abbot +Oscar Joseph

After we were informed of your resignation from the leadership of our Holy Order, the heart has changeable feelings.

On the one hand, I am glad that you decided to hand over the General Abbotship to an equally worthy Hierarch, and on the other, I feel a deep sadness. We have had a long course these years, with strong collaborations, joint journeys and partnerships on many issues, the selection of worthy scientists and members of our family. But time brings a heavy burden on both of us. As you know, I have been elected both as Primate for the dioceses of Europe and as President of our Holy Synod, which means a very heavy task and responsibilities. Here in France, the challenges are many and our endurance is small and weak. We always invoke with our prayers the intercession of the Holy Spirit with the Blessings of God to overcome the difficulties. Time has also brought various health problems and weaknesses, but I must at least for two more years fulfill my duties but also endure. I have a lot to say about you, about the correct faith in the path of Saint Benedict, on the path of devotion and spirituality. You gave in these years, all your energy and holiness, encouraging all those whom some others disappointed and discouraged. The light that has passed through these years is unfading, it shines and illuminates hearts and souls.

I could write a lot, but all this is contained in a phrase: we thank you, our respected Abbot, and precious brother.

We pray for you May the Good God show you your way

Brotherly

In Christ and Mary

+George Papathanasiou OCCO Archbishop

I am compelled to share this edited letter from one of my dearest friends in Greece. + Bishop George and I have been friends for years. His faithful leadership has changed the face not only of Europe but the world. Read carefully and you will see the struggles that true bishops experience. I am humbled to know him.

I write on behalf of my brothers in Africa and on my own behalf wish to congratulate ++ Abbot General Isaac Simon, OCCO, on winning the elections and assuming the role of Abbot General of this noble and respected Order.

I wish him God's blessings, wisdom and the commitment to enable him execute the duties of Abbot General to the glory of God.

Once again congratulations and God richly bless you.

I also wish to thank our immediate past Abbot General ++Oscar Joseph, OCCO, for his love, commitment which has helped bring Order to its present state.

I wish you God's, blessings.
Bishop Edward Minnah

Thank you, Bishop Edward Minnah, Dean of Africa. we appreciate your kind words and blessings. We look forward to the growth of the Cistercian Order in Africa thanks to your loving care.



By Jay Van Nostrand, OCCO/Obl, Trustee

Ecclesiastes 3

¹¹ He hath made all things good in their time, and hath delivered the world to their consideration, so that man cannot find out the work which God hath made from the beginning to the end. (Douay-Rheims American Edition)

We all have a very human tendency to think of time as a possession. We routinely and reflexively say things like: “I have time,” or “I don’t have time” or “I’ve got all the time in the world.” And so, we tend to believe and act as though we control the time that we think of as ours.

But the reality is very different. Starting with the fact that we do not know how much time we have (because we did not control when we were born and we do not control when we must die), all we really control is how we use our talents and our energy within each day that we’re given.

How we are to use our time is an essential element of our blessed Rule of St. Benedict. Using our time wisely and reverently, reminding ourselves daily that eventually we must die, is a fundamental requirement. At the same time, we are instructed to do all things in moderation and in balance so that we can always pay attention and devote ourselves to matters that will be meaningful in eternity.

So now our Order comes to a time of transition where we say farewell to Abbot Oscar Joseph and welcome Abbot Isaac Simon.

Oscar Joseph has led us for the past 28 years. The Order is very different now from what it was when he took on that responsibility. We have grown in numbers, and we are much stronger organizationally and financially. But far more important than worldly measures of success are the many ways that all of us have been taught and led to grow closer to God and how we have been inspired to be salt and light to our families and our communities around the world.

That transition (or *conversatio*) has certainly been true for me personally. Being part of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross has been a life-changing experience. I’m being taught to pray, to listen for God’s voice, and how to set my own beliefs and desires so that I can follow Him. And I’ve been inspired and led to use what I’ve learned and my God-given talents to help others to find their own paths as God has provided for them.

The Teacher in Ecclesiastes points out that we are not to know or to see God’s work in us through to completion. As the Apostle tells us:

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil 1:6 NRSV).

So, what began through Abbot Oscar Joseph will now continue in and through Abbot Isaac Simon.

I believe that Abbot Isaac Simon’s talent, education and experience equip to lead us with discernment, patience and grace. I know that all of us pray for him. We ask God to bless him with grace, good health and growth in wisdom. Please help him to see the world as you do.

And we also pray with him that all of us will do whatever we need to do to hear that still small voice and that we will set aside our own preconceptions and preoccupations and follow where that voice is leading us to go.



Goodbyes are hard to express.

Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO, you pulled us from a loud noisy world to a brand-new valley of peace, walking together to a valley of warm green grass with the sounds of birds and gentle clean breeze. Only with the expectation to see and find God and hold hands with Jesus Christ.

My dear Abbot Oscar Joseph, please receive my admiration and respect. Let us always remember the first day you called me and asked me “do you really want to be a Monk? “

You are responsible for my peace of heart and soul, my desire to help the needy, for my thirst for praying for others, and the strong, not human, feeling of spiritual power.

I thank God for providing me this experience of unconditional love and respect. For providing me, Abbot Oscar Joseph, to this amazing and wonderful family of Cistercians and the wonderful groups working hand in hand as family. You once told me: “don’t worry we are your family.” Thank you!

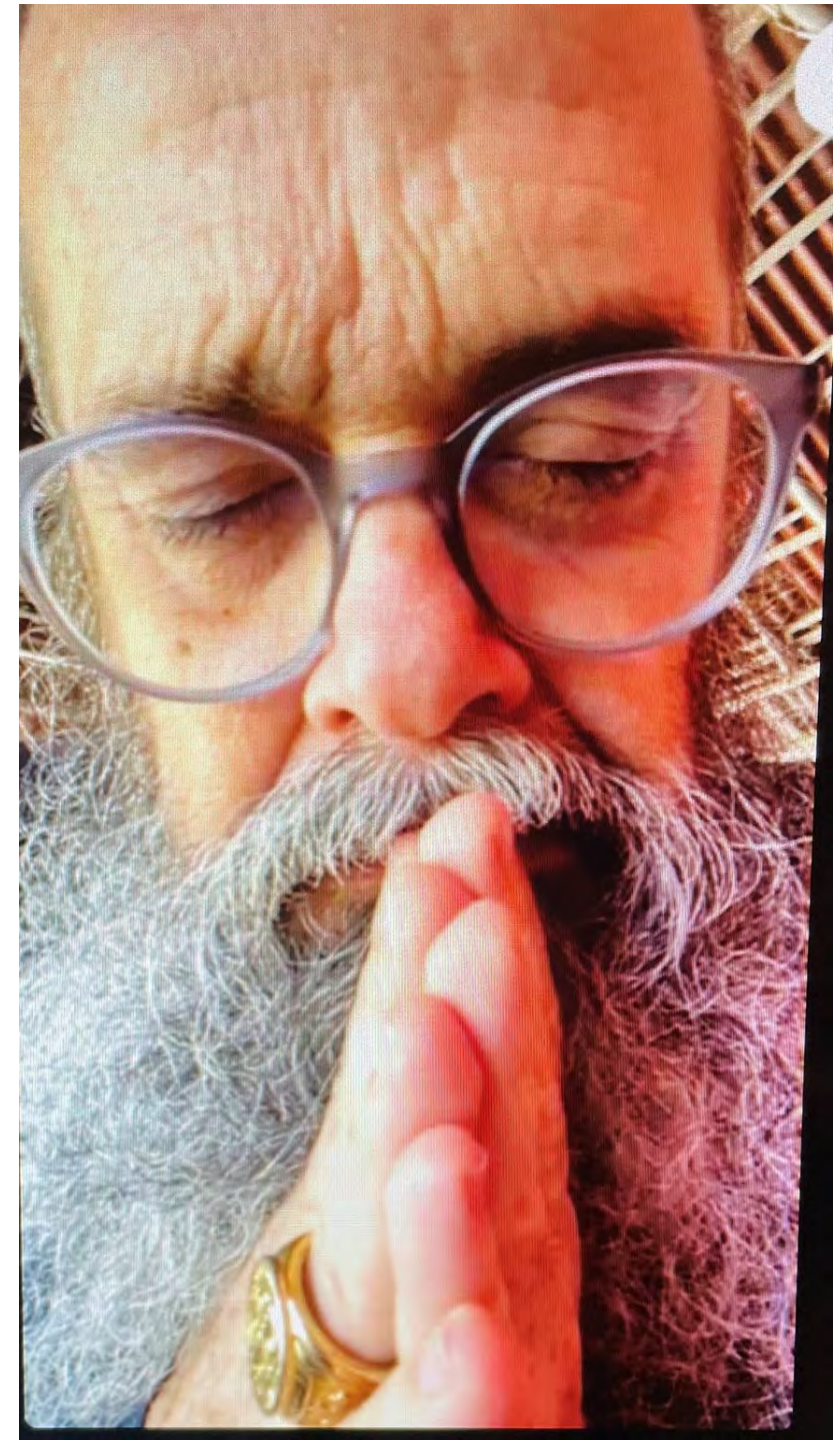
I welcome our new Abbot General Isaac Simon, OCCO with expectations, an open heart and willingness to take his direction.

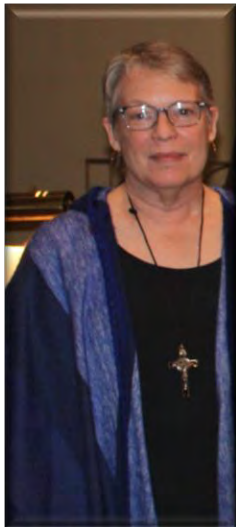
God bless you both!

Prior Jorge, OCCO

Priory of St. Joseph the Worker

Colombia, South America





Oblate Linda, OCCO/ObI

Welcome Abbot General Isaac Simon, OCCO. May God bless you abundantly and may you find true purpose and joy in your ministry within the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross. May God guide you and protect you, and may God be in all you undertake. May God provide you wisdom and discernment, strength and endurance, fruitfulness, faithfulness, and humility.

A loving farewell to Abbot General Oscar Joseph, OCCO. Thank you for your faithful service and guidance to our order. All have benefited greatly from your leadership as Abbot. Thank you for the example you have lived before us, that we might live like Christ. Thank you for the challenges you have placed before us, that we might grow in Christ. May God continue to guide you and confirm you in wisdom. May God prosper you as you continue to serve Him in all things.

Blessings to both of you as you continue to serve the Lord in your respective callings. He Who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

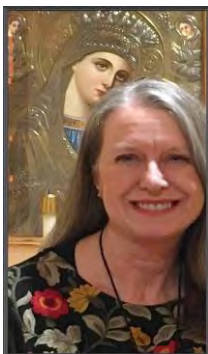
Lance, Trustee



I feel that God has richly blessed me to be associated with Abbot Oscar Joseph and the Cistercians. Abbot is not only my spiritual counselor but also my friend. Not too many people can say that. Even though he is passing his mantle on he will continue to be those things to me.

Having said that I would express my heartfelt welcome to Bishop Isaac Simon as the Abbot General of The Cistercian Order of The Holy Cross. I feel that he will fulfill his calling in a mighty way. God has anointed his life with wisdom and and desire to work.

Janice Joy Arizam OCCO/ObI



Dear Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO

Congratulations on finding this new person to take the position. You have done an outstanding job and have given it your all. You have my vote for Bishop Issac Simon.

Blessings Be for the transition.

The Efficacy of Prayer

What is prayer?

Prayer is the raising up of the mind and heart to God.

How do we raise up our mind and heart to God?

We raise up our mind and heart to God by thinking of God; by adoring, praising, and thanking him; and by begging of him all blessings for soul and body.

(Quoted from: A Simple Catechism – Basic Catechism of Christian Doctrine)

Being a person of prayer, I am often asked what exactly prayer is. I describe prayer as having a sincere, respectful conversation with God. It is a time to acknowledge that we do not have all of the answers. Prayer allows us to transcend the limitations of our humanity and extend our reach to the Divine Presence. It can be difficult to pray for a variety of reasons. But it gets easier to pray the more time we spend engaged in prayer.

Praying does not have to be complicated. Start by reciting the Lord's Prayer, organized prayers found in prayer books/worship books, or by writing down and telling God our prayer needs. We should not be afraid to speak to God. Jesus encourages us to wear God out with an overabundance of our prayers (Luke 18:1-8). Persistence in prayer cultivates within us a greater sensitivity to the voice, power, and presence of God in our lives. Spending time in prayer is spending time with God; faithfulness in prayer will lead to prayers being answered!

Be blessed!

Abbot General Isaac Simon



++Isacc Simon, OCCO
Abbot General



++Isacc Simon, OCCO
Abbot General

To Put One's Hope in God

++Abbot General Isaac Simon, OCCO

“Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh... Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

(excerpt: 2 Corinthians 12: 7-9)

Meditating on the Rule of St Benedict, I reflected on Chapter 4 – Instruments of Good Works. One instrument is “To Put One’s Hope in God”. When we are confronted with a difficult situation, we ask God to deliver us from the situation. We certainly do not see sadness, poor health, family discord, or financial strife as matters to be embraced.

As Cistercians, we to put our hope in God. This means that we continue to have faith in God even though we may not understand why we must suffer or go through difficult times. Praying daily, reading Holy Scripture daily, studying the Rule, and by imitating Christ, we cannot help but to trust God.

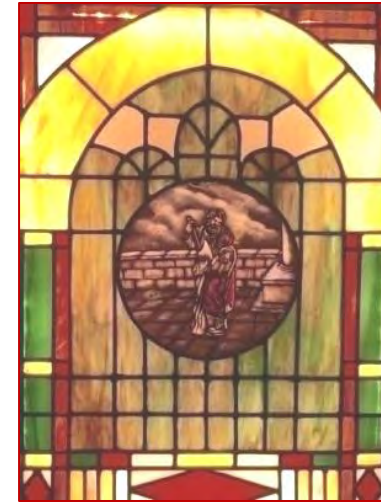
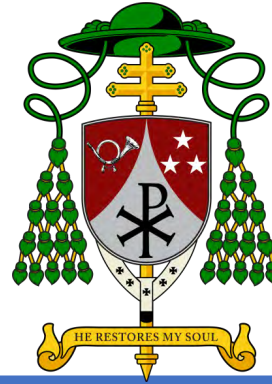
The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the church at Corinth, explained how God revealed to him that life’s difficult situations are opportunities for God to demonstrate His presence in our lives. Thus, these matters become moments of triumph and testimony of what it means to have faith in God. As Cistercians, let us strive to live our lives as a testimony of faithful service to God Almighty.

Be blessed!

Abbot General Isaac Simon OCCO



Monks make great Priests



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

While we require the traditional qualifications for ordination/incardination, the 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 “We Got Your Back Program” 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 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
Financial Support

These are Your Volunteers





*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 that best meet Your goals.

**Master of Theology, Th.M.
Doctor of Theology, Th.D.
Honorary Doctorates D.D. or LL.D.**

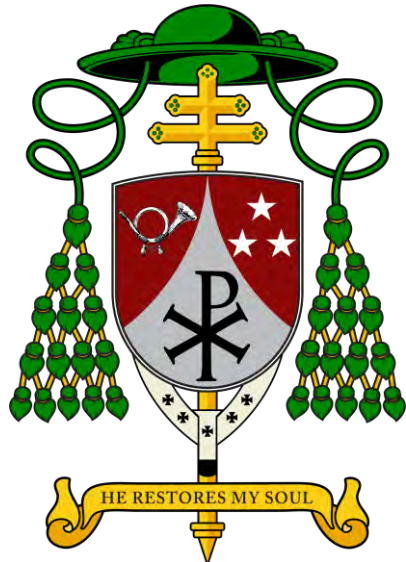
**Saint Stephen Harding Theological College and
Seminary
is a Religious Order affiliated educational institution
under
the authority of The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, a
501
non-profit corporation. Our degrees are classified as
ecclesiastically accredited.**

“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 led 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.”

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.