

Obsculta

"Listen with the ear of your heart."

March 2026



**"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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++Isacc Simon, OCCO
Abbot General

A monastic community welcoming Christians from many traditions.

The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross honors the ancient tradition of external oblates , hermits, and monks.

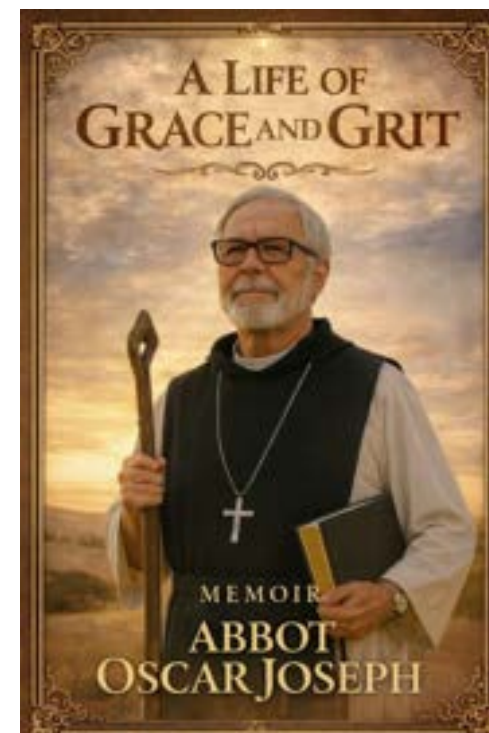
Founded on February 17, 1981, this monastic community has remained steadfast in its sacred vocation, living its prayer, work, and witness in unbroken continuity from that day to the present. Through seasons of change and seasons of grace, the community has kept its lamp burning, its altar tended, and its life of devotion uninterrupted. The spirit that inspired its founding has endured across the years, preserved in the quiet fidelity of those who have carried its charism forward. In this continuity, the community bears witness to the enduring strength of its calling.



We are pleased to announce that

- **The Most Rev. Oscar Joseph, O.C.C.O., Ph.D., D.S.T.**
- **Abbot General's Advisory Council Member**
- **Chaplain/Cellarer will serve the Abbot General and The Cistercian Order in spiritual development and Sacrament services.**

www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com



The Most Rev. Oscar Joseph, O.C.C.O., M.S., Ph.D., D.S.T.

Chaplain

We would encourage everyone to create a local Cistercian Chapter in their area. The rewards are wonderful. I can help you to do that.



Working with others plays an important role in developing a growing spiritual life because it provides encouragement, accountability, and shared wisdom. When individuals walk alongside others who are also seeking spiritual growth, they benefit from different perspectives, experiences, and insights that deepen understanding. Community helps prevent isolation, which can weaken spiritual commitment, and instead fosters consistency through mutual support. Learning from others' strengths and struggles can inspire perseverance and help individuals recognize that growth is a shared journey rather than a solitary effort.

Additionally, working with others strengthens spiritual growth by creating opportunities for service, reflection, and meaningful relationships. Through collaboration, individuals practice values such as patience, humility, compassion, and forgiveness in real-life situations. Group prayer, discussion, and study can sharpen faith and make spiritual practices more intentional and impactful. As people support and challenge one another, they grow not only in knowledge but also in character, allowing their spiritual life to mature in a balanced and lasting way.

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for
brethren to dwell together in unity. (Ps 133:1)*

Jay, Oblate, Trustee



The seemingly simple request to put down my thoughts on what our Cistercian Chapter means to me prompted a surprising range and depth of thought. Lance and Abbot Oscar are my friends, and they are partners on my faith journey and on our journey together within the Order. When we meet, we have fellowship together, we share how God is working in each of our lives, we pray and study His word, and we discern together what He would have us do in and through our Order.

In trying to explain and summarize all of that, one realization rose above all the others and that is that our chapter is an astonishing gift of grace.

Lance, Abbot Oscar and I come from different backgrounds and life experiences. We initially came together, not by any specific decisions or intentions of our own but through each of us listening for the promptings of the Holy Spirit and following where the Lord was leading. Only by His grace we were brought together so that we could, in some small ways, bring glory to Him.

I come away from that realization with an overwhelming sense of gratitude not just for the gift of our Chapter community but also for the Gift that made possible everything that I have and everything that I might hope for here on earth and in heaven.

Thanks be to God!

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Lance, Trustee

Prayer has no denominational boundaries



Very few of us have ever had the opportunity to experience a true miracle healing. I am a witness to one that was manifested in my daughter's life.

Several years ago, she was admitted to the hospital with severe abdominal pain and sepsis. After running tests, they determined that she had a three-inch tear in her esophagus and scheduled surgery for repair.

I called upon Abbot Oscar Joseph to come for prayer. He responded quickly and he, myself, a friend's pastor, and my Baptist pastor had fervent prayer. Upon prep for surgery, they discovered the tear had shrunk from three inches to a pinhole and no surgery was needed.

She spent three weeks in hospital draining the poison that had leaked to her abdomen. After about a month she was home doing well.

I said all this to confirm that prayer has no denominational boundaries, and the gift of healing starts with prayer

The Chaplain says, " I remember those prayers well. We were in an informal "coffee" room casually talking. I suggested that while we had all this leadership present, we might want to offer a prayer." I was impressed that everyone's prayer was sincere not ego or denominationally centered.



This book is respectfully dedicated to Prior Jorge, a first-order monk and the revered Prior of the Priory of Saint Joseph The Worker in Colombia, South America. His life serves as an exceptional beacon of self-sacrifice, dedicated entirely to the service of humanity, and an inspiring testament to a deep and abiding love for God. The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross is immeasurably blessed by his continued affiliation, finding his spiritual leadership and presence to be a source of profound joy and enduring inspiration for all within the community.

THE CALL THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

An Ordained Minister's
Discernment, Sorrows, and Joys



Bishop Oscar Joseph, M.S., Ph.D., D.S.T.

Daily Prayer Resources for Our Community

In our monastery we honor the rich diversity of Christian traditions represented among our monks and friends. Each tradition carries its own rhythm of prayer, its own language of devotion, and its own way of lifting the heart toward God. To support this unity-in-diversity, we have gathered a set of daily prayer resources for Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant believers. These books and online tools allow each person to pray faithfully within his own tradition while sharing a common rhythm of Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline.

Catholic Tradition

Catholic members of our community may use the *Liturgy of the Hours* in its full four-volume form or the single-volume *Christian Prayer*. Both offer the official Hours of the Church and provide a steady anchor for the day. Devotional companions such as the *Catholic Book of Prayers* or the *Blessed Trinity Book of Catholic Prayers* enrich personal prayer. For those who prefer digital access, iBreviary and Universalis offer the complete Hours and daily readings.



- **Anglican Tradition**

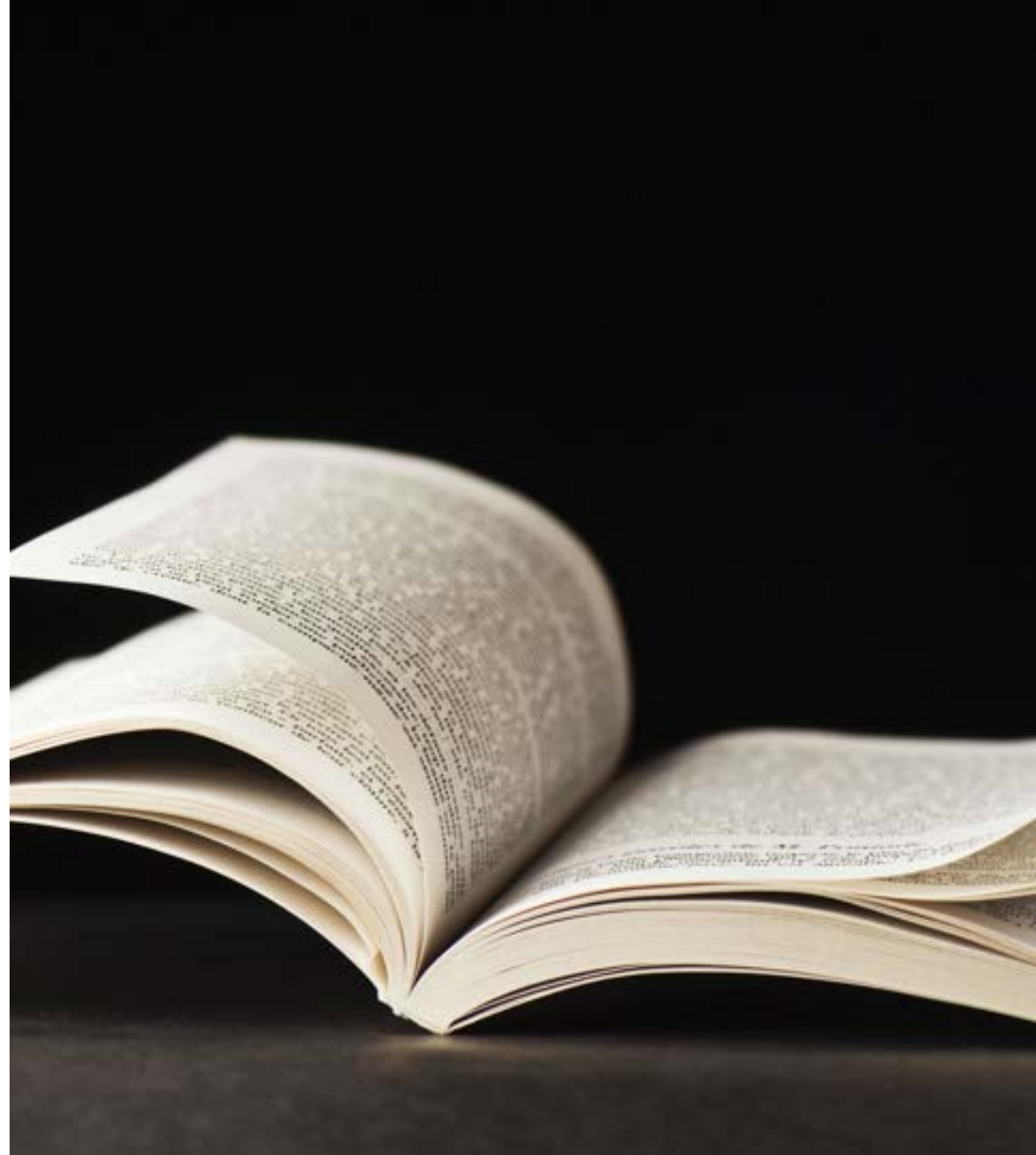
- Those formed in the Anglican way may pray from the classic *1662 Book of Common Prayer* or the *1979 Episcopal BCP*, each offering Morning and Evening Prayer with a simple, steady cadence. The *Divine Worship: Daily Office* preserves the beauty of Anglican patrimony within the Catholic Church. Devotional life is supported by *St. Gregory's Prayer Book*, and online prayer is available through DailyOffice2019.com or the Church of England's Daily Prayer site.

- **Protestant Tradition**

- Protestant members of our community may draw from resources that emphasize Scripture-based prayer and personal devotion. *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller, *Prayer* by Tim Keller, and *Praying the Bible* by Donald Whitney offer practical guidance for daily communion with God. Additional helps such as *The Circle Maker* and *Before Amen* encourage boldness and simplicity in prayer. Digital options like the YouVersion Bible App and Lectio365 provide guided morning and evening prayer.

- **A Shared Rhythm of Prayer**

- Though our books differ, our hearts are united. Each monk prays according to his tradition, yet all of us keep the same daily rhythm. This unity honors the breadth of the Christian family while preserving the integrity of each tradition. In this way, our monastery becomes a living witness to the harmony God desires for His people.





Listening as a Daily Discipline

Listening in the Rule is not passive; it is the first act of obedience to God. Today it can be exercised through:

Morning stillness — beginning the day with a few minutes of silence before any device, task, or conversation. This trains the heart to hear God before hearing the world.

Attentive presence — giving full attention to the person in front of you, without rushing to respond or correct.

Scripture listening — reading slowly, aloud if possible, allowing a single phrase to settle and guide the day.

Listening to one's life — noticing patterns, consolations, and desolations, and discerning where God is speaking through them. Listening becomes the doorway to humility, because it acknowledges that wisdom comes from outside the self.

Prayer as the Rhythm of the Day

Benedictine prayer is steady, simple, and woven into the hours. A modern person can practice this by:

Setting fixed moments (morning, midday, evening) for brief prayer—psalms, a collect, or a simple “Lord, have mercy.”

Letting work become prayer by offering each task to God before beginning it.

Using breath prayer throughout the day to return the heart to God in moments of stress or distraction.

Keeping a short rule—a psalm, a gospel verse, or a written prayer repeated daily until it becomes part of the soul's fabric.

Prayer in the Benedictine sense is not dramatic; it is faithful, steady, and transformative over time.

The Cistercian Way

The Cistercian Way

Obedience as a Way of Freedom

Obedience in the Rule is not servile; it is the willingness to be shaped by God through community, Scripture, and wise authority.

Today it may look like:

Submitting one's will to God's prompting

even when it disrupts personal preference.

Receiving correction without defensiveness,

trusting that truth spoken in charity is a gift.

Honoring commitments—

to family, ministry, work, and promises made.

Letting Scripture and tradition guide decisions,

rather than impulse or emotion. Obedience frees the heart from self-will and opens it to grace.

Stability as Faithfulness to Place and People

Stability is one of Benedict's most countercultural gifts. In a world of constant movement, it teaches rootedness. Today it can be practiced by:

Remaining faithful to one's community,

even when it is imperfect or challenging.

Staying present to one's responsibilities,

rather than escaping into distraction or novelty.

Cultivating a sacred space at home—

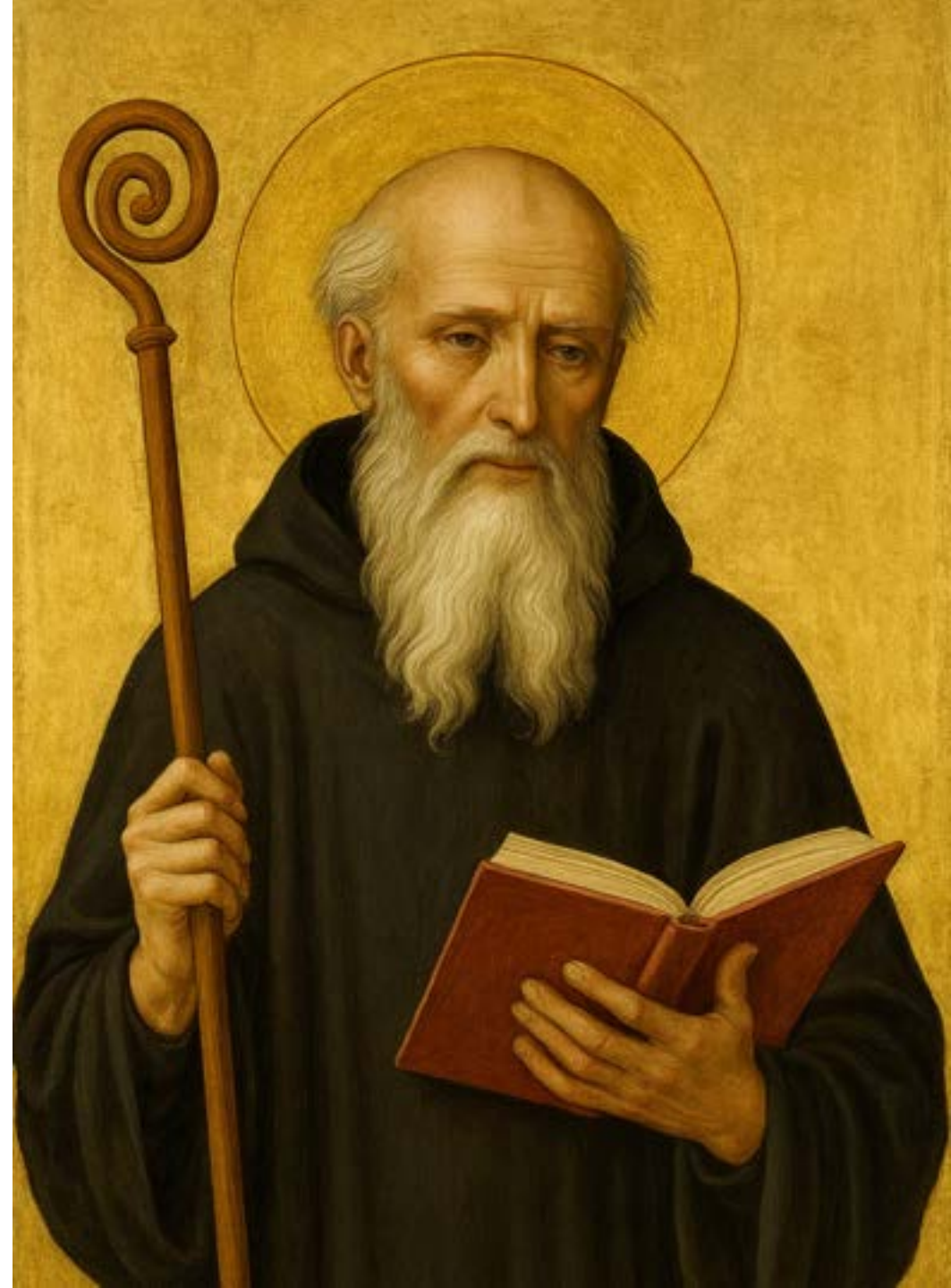
a prayer corner, a candle, a cross—that anchors the soul.

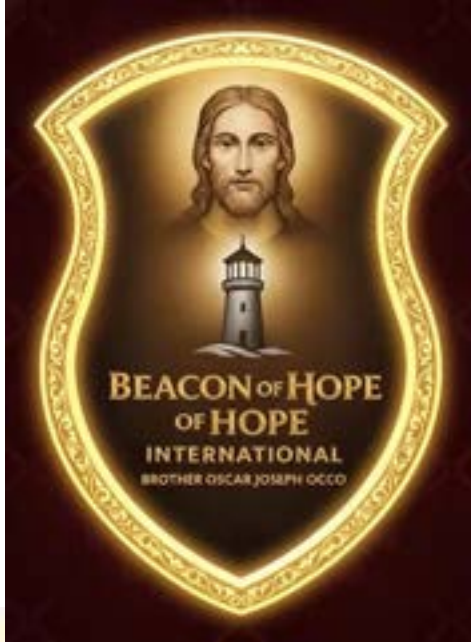
Committing to long-term spiritual growth,

not hopping from one spiritual trend to another. Stability forms a person who is dependable, grounded, and capable of deep love.

The Cistercian Way

- **Conversatio as Ongoing Conversion**
- Conversatio morum—the promise to keep turning toward God—reminds us that conversion is lifelong. Today it is exercised through:
 - **Small, daily acts of transformation**—choosing patience, forgiveness, or restraint in ordinary moments.
 - **Regular self-examination** to notice where God is inviting change.
 - **Letting go of habits that diminish the soul**, whether spiritual, emotional, or practical.
 - **Welcoming new grace**—trusting that God is not finished forming the heart.
- Conversatio is the gentle, steady work of becoming more Christlike over a lifetime.
- **Bringing the Five Together**
- When these practices are woven together, they create a life that is:
 - **Attentive** (through listening)
 - **Anchored** (through prayer)
 - **Surrendered** (through obedience)
 - **Rooted** (through stability)
 - **Growing** (through conversatio)
- This is the Benedictine way: simple, steady, and deeply transformative.





Brother Oscar Joseph,
OCCO



*Welcoming you to a path of healing
and spiritual depth through:*

- Healing Services
- Retreats
- Seminars
- Spiritual Direction
- Individual Counseling

✉ AbbotPrays@aol.com

🌐 AbbotOscarJoseph.com

Our God Lord has entrusted ++Oscar Joseph, OCCO with this ministry.

**Beacon of Hope International
Statement of Purpose & Mission**

We have 3.4K Care Partners in ten countries.

At Beacon of Hope International, we are devoted to guiding souls into deeper communion with God through the sacred journey of trust. We believe that learning to trust God is not merely a spiritual discipline—it is a transformative pilgrimage. It begins in surrender and unfolds through prayer, silence, and service. Trust is not passive; it is a courageous act of faith, a deliberate resting in divine providence even when the path ahead is veiled in mystery.

As we yield to God’s rhythm, trust becomes the gateway to grace. It anchors us in peace, liberates us from captivity, and draws us into union with the Eternal. In this surrender, we become vessels of hope—living icons who reflect the light of Christ to a world longing for sacred presence.

We affirm that:

- **Trust in God enables us to break through our captivity and become one with Him.**
- **Gratitude opens the soul to communion with God, self, and others—transcending fear and awakening love.**
- **Gentleness is the path to true joy and freedom, guiding others toward God’s eternal intent.**

Through these virtues, we seek to embody the mission of Beacon of Hope International: to radiate divine light, restore sacred identity, and lead others into the fullness of life found only in God.

How We Accomplish Our Mission

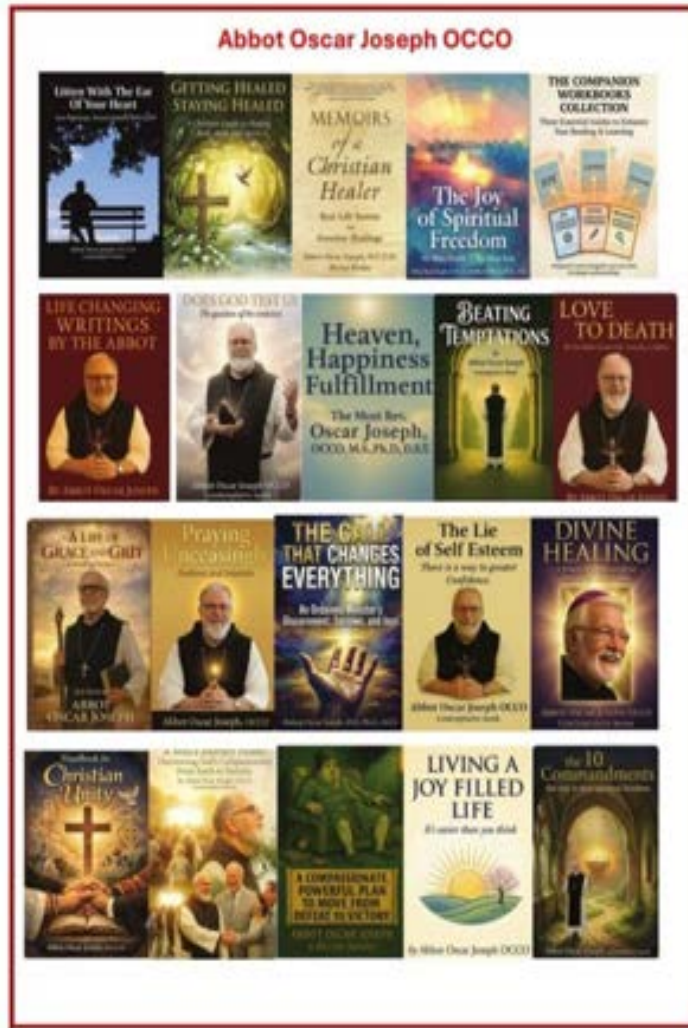
We accomplish our goals by building trust in God, forming people in spiritual identity, and serving others with compassion and clarity.

**BEACON OF HOPE
APOSTOLIC BLESSING**

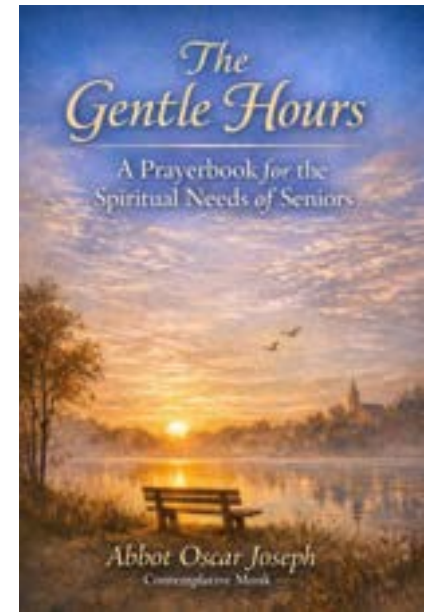
When Bishop Oscar Joseph gives his apostolic blessing to the coin that represents the mission of the Beacon of Hope, it becomes a holy and sacred object.

1. It becomes holy.
The blessing marks the coin as a reminder that God is near and working in your life.
2. A prayer rests upon it.
The bishop asks God to watch over you and to deepen your faith, hope, and charity each time you hold or carry it.
3. It becomes a sign of your walk with God.

Bishop Oscar Joseph, OCCO



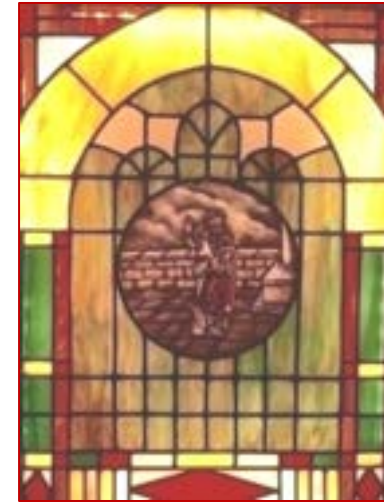
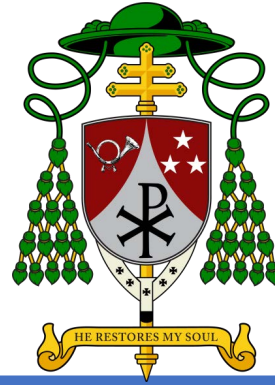
**All books are available for sale
as paper, e books, and PDFs.
Go to:
www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com**



There are few prayer books designed to address the needs of the elderly, so I have just created this one.



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.

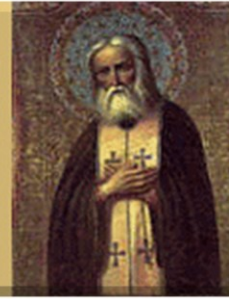




The St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary

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.

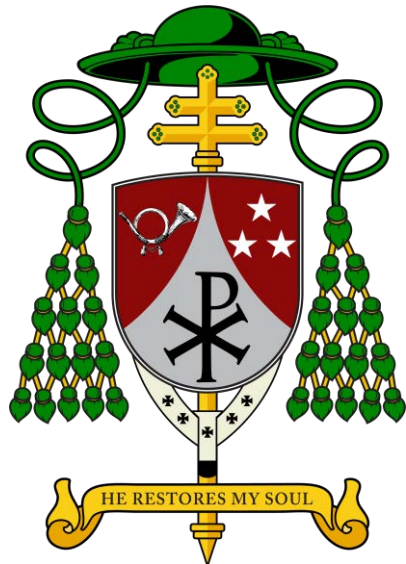
**Saint Stephen Harding Theological College and
Seminary**
is a Religious Order affiliated educational institution
under
the authority of The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, a
501
non-profit corporation. Our degrees are classified as
ecclesiastically accredited.

“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.