



# Benet Hill Monastery

3190 Benet Lane ∞ Colorado Springs, CO 80921-1509

## History of Oblates

In the early part of the sixth century when [St. Benedict](#) (same link as above) wrote his [Rule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_St._Benedict) and gathered disciples into small communities called monasteries. Parents brought their sons as “oblates,” or gifts of God to the monks. The boy oblates lived the monastic life in much the same fashion as their elders, and many became full-fledged monks as adults. They received an exceptional education in the monastic school.

In the later Middle Ages, *oblatus*, *confrater*, and *donatus* became interchangeable titles. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the term oblate was first applied to adults who, for their generosity or special service to the monastery, received the privilege of lay membership with a share in the prayers and good works of the brethren.

A more precise status was given to Oblates by [Blessed William, Abbot of Hirschau \(+1091\)](#). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_of\\_Hirsau](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_of_Hirsau) He established definite rules for two types of Oblates. The Interns or Regular Oblates lived in the monastery and submitted to its discipline without, however, making formal vows. The Externs or Secular Oblates lived in the world but were affiliated with the monastery. They promised obedience and sometimes perfect chastity, and gave over a part or all of their possessions to the monastery. Historians tell us that large numbers of the faithful thus consecrated themselves to God and to the Order of Saint Benedict by uniting themselves as Oblates to such famous monasteries as Cluny, Hirschau, Saint Blase, and others. The Holy Roman Emperor, [Saint Henry II \(972-1024\)](#), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07227a.htm> showed such great love and veneration for the Order that he has been chosen the special patron of the Oblates. His wife, Cunegond, was canonized in 1200.

## Saint Frances of Rome

In the fifteenth century, [Saint Frances of Rome \(1384-1440\)](#) [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=49](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=49) induced a number of noble Roman women to renounce their worldly and extravagant life for a more perfect Christian life in their homes and the exercise of charity to the poor. They made no vows, nor did they wear a special religious habit, but placed themselves under the spiritual direction of the [Olivetans](#). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olivetans>

Some years later they began to live a community life but merely promised obedience to the superior whom they had chosen to rule over them calling themselves Oblates of Saint Benedict. This original Institute of Oblates, founded by Saint Frances, exists in Rome to this day. They engage in daily common prayer and acts of charity to the poor and the unfortunate. It is therefore proper that



# Benet Hill Monastery

3190 Benet Lane ∞ Colorado Springs, CO 80921-1509

Saint Frances of Rome has been made the heavenly patroness of the Oblates of Saint Benedict. Her feast is celebrated on March 9.

Men and women outside the monasteries wanted to be affiliated in some way with the work and prayer of the monks or nuns. These individuals were married, had family obligations and employment. They lived in the secular world, but offered themselves to God, dedicating their lives to living the Gospel with the guidance of the Rule of St. Benedict. The Rule and the teachings of Christ were adapted to family, work, social and civil responsibilities. Still, the oblates tried to do what St. Benedict made so basic in his Rule: to seek God daily.

In modern times, thousands of oblates worldwide continue to find inspiration and spiritual fulfillment when they follow the treasure of and the guidance in the Rule of Benedict.

## Elena Piscopia, Oblate

Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia <http://www.agnesscott.edu/lriddle/women/piscopia.htm> (1646-1684) was a brilliant scholar, philosopher, musician and Benedictine Oblate. She became one of the brightest lights of the University of Padua. Church officials refused to confer the title of Doctor of Theology upon a woman. When Elena reapplied at her father's insistence, the Church allowed Elena Piscopia to apply for a Doctorate of Philosophy instead. She is honored as the first woman to earn a doctorate by a [stained glass window http://library.vassar.edu/about/cornaro.html](http://library.vassar.edu/about/cornaro.html) at Vassar College. She died in 1689 at age 39 and was buried among the monks in Padua's Monastery of San Giustina.

## Modern Oblates

The final canonical status of the Oblates was established by a Brief of Pope Leo XIII, dated June 17, 1898. On July 23, 1904, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued a decree officially approving the *Statutes and Rules of the Secular Oblates of Saint Benedict*, and these *Statutes*, with a few slight alterations and additions, were again approved by a Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Religious on March 24, 1927.

In 1949, the first National Conference of Directors of Oblates was held at St. John's Abbey in Minnesota. The 15 directors from the United States and Canada who attended stressed that Oblate life was to be taken seriously and that people should be invested only if they had a genuine desire to seek God according to the Benedictine way. They also devised "declarations" which were appended to the 39 statutes issued by the Holy See in 1927.

In 1942 a community of Benedictine women asked their chaplain to inquire about the possibility of receiving oblates into their monastery. Finally, in 1961 women's monasteries were allowed to have their own oblates.



# Benet Hill Monastery

3190 Benet Lane ∞ Colorado Springs, CO 80921-1509

Beginning in the 1970s, directors of oblates continued to meet regularly to share ideas and publications. In 1996 *The Cloister Walk* by Oblate Kathleen Norris became a *New York Times* bestseller and did much to publicize the Benedictine way of spirituality. As membership in traditional monastic communities declined, the number of laypersons interested in Benedictine spirituality and becoming Benedictine oblates rose. At the same time, interest in alternative forms of monasticism life among Christians of all denominations sparked an increase in ecumenical communities. Likewise, the election of [Pope Benedict XVI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Benedict_XVI) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope\\_Benedict\\_XVI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Benedict_XVI) also called attention to the life of St. Benedict.

There has been a dramatic rise in the number of Benedictine Oblates in the United States who attach themselves to a particular monastic community and make a life commitment as a genuine spiritual quest. In a study in the fall of 2003, Brother Edward Vebelun, OSB, of [Saint John's Abbey](#), Collegeville, Minnesota surveyed the Oblate Directors of the North American Association (45 responses from 118 surveys sent). He found three times as many Oblates as professed religious.

Brother Vebelun found that Benedictine spirituality seems to contain something that yields a rich, and perhaps mysterious, harvest. He says that the [benefits](#) that oblates articulated show the many and varied ways that non-monastics can take Benedictine spirituality, apply it to their lives, and find spiritual meaning from it."

## International Congress of Oblates

In 2005 Benedictine Oblates gathered in Rome for the [First International Congress of Oblates](#). <http://www.benedictine-oblates.org/2005/index-en.htm> Oblates gathered in Rome in October, 2009 for the [Second International Congress](#). <http://www.benedictine-oblates.org/2009/index-en.htm> A Congress is also being planned for 2013,