

Lutheran Confraternity at WVU

Oblate Customary & Lutherhaus Rules

November 2014

Preface

A working group of the Board of Directors of the Lutheran Campus Foundation at WVU has expressed a desire for the establishment of a local religious confraternity modeled as a community or deanery¹ of the Oblates of St. Benedict to be centered, in conjunction with the Lutheran Campus Ministry, at WVU. The Lutherhaus is to be used as a vehicle for the establishment of and support of this oblate community.

Lutherhaus shall be the principal residence hall for the confraternity, specifically in its WVU Deanery. As such, it shall be ordered (i.e., the life within it and maintenance of it shall be informed and disciplined) by this customary.²

It must be understood that an oblate (member of the confraternity) accrues no benefit to him or herself before God by making oblation.³ Indeed, Lutherans have a legitimate distrust and historical bias against confraternities. As an appendix to a treatise on the sacrament of the altar, Luther denounced the confraternities of his day,⁴ but facile reading of this appendix glosses over his suggested reform of the confraternities. In this reform, there is room for the confraternities so long as the confratres remember the proper place of all such resolutions and vows, namely the advancement in sanctification (which is of benefit to both self and neighbor) through the disciplining of the self.⁵

The Congregation of the Servants of Christ, the Benedictine community centered at St. Augustine's House, Oxford, Michigan, is in the process of developing an oblate customary as an augmentation of its current associate membership. It is anticipated that this confraternity at WVU will be accessioned into the Congregation of the Servants of Christ upon ratification of the congregation's customary. At that time, this customary will be revised to reflect that integration.

The first chapters of this customary relate to the "spiritual" discipline of the oblature. The next chapters relate directly to the regulation of Lutherhaus. The closing chapters relate to entrance into the

¹ A deanery is a division of a larger monastic foundation. It may be thought of as similar to a chapter of a national fraternity or sorority.

² "The Rule is the primary spiritual heritage of all Benedictine monasteries, but its great age makes it difficult to implement in detailed fashion. Since the early middle ages, monasteries have found it useful to draw up 'house-rules' (*consuetudines*) [a customary] to be literally observed." (*The Benedictine Handbook* [Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003], 341-342).

³ Oblation is not only the making of the resolution of an oblate; it is also the following of the discipline of an oblate. Indeed, the true oblation is not the resolution but rather the sacrifice one's entire being to God. Cf. Pilipp Jakob Spener, *The Spiritual Priesthood: Briefly described according to the word of God in seventy questions and answers* (1677) in *Pietists: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 52.

⁴ Martin Luther, *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods*, LW 35:67ff. He also condemned the monastic institutions, but, likewise, offered a proposal for their reform. (Martin Luther, *On Monastic Vows*, LW _____ff.).

⁵Q.v. Martin Luther, *The Holy Sacrament of Baptism* (1519), LW 35:40f.

confraternity, formation, and membership, and they may be superseded with integration with the Congregation of the Servants of Christ.

Chapter I: Department

An oblate shall so order his/her life as to bring glory to God and not shame to God or the Oblates of St. Benedict. In all things, the oblate shall look to Luther's explanation of the Decalogue as presented in his *Small Catechism* and *Large Catechism*.

Chapter II: At Corporate Worship

An oblate shall actively participate in corporate worship, joining in the prayers and hymns and attending to the reading and preaching of the Word in the chapel and when at home.

If asked to read, assist at altar, offer the prayers, or serve as thurifer, crucifer, acolyte, or porter,⁶ an oblate shall gladly assent unless some good reason prevents the oblate from so doing.

Unless required to sit in choir or in a designated place of service, an oblate shall assist guests and visitors to the chapel and at home to navigate the liturgy and provide all assistance to make the guest or visitor feel welcome and secure.

The wearing by oblates of the cuculla⁷ in chapel worship shall be at the discretion of the chaplain.

Chapter III: Daily Prayer

Oblates are encouraged to pray frequently, but, at minimum, oblates shall pray at morning and at evening.

When these prayers are said privately, they may be said at a time convenient for the oblate. When said privately, the oblate may use a form of the oblate's choosing. For those who desire guidance, the oblate may use an abbreviated form of lauds or matins in the morning and vespers or compline at night. Alternatively, *For All the Saints: A Prayer Book for and By the Church* (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1994) may be used. At minimum, the oblate shall use the forms for morning and evening prayer accompanying Luther's *Small Catechism*.

Oblates may (and are encouraged) to join together with other oblates (as a deanery or in smaller configurations in either a regular or *ad hoc* fashion) to pray an office. This shall satisfy the requirement for that prayer office. When doing so, oblates may use the chapel sanctuary (assuming there is no other scheduled event in the sanctuary).

When corporate prayer is offered at the chapel, all oblates on the Lutheran Campus Center property shall join in that prayer (unless dispensed by the chaplain or the senior⁸). This shall satisfy the requirement of a daily prayer (e.g., compline in the chapel shall satisfy the requirement for evening prayer). An oblate should exercise such prudence as not to begin an activity which cannot be suspended

⁶ In more modern parlance, the porter is the usher. Porters greet people as they enter, ensure that they have all materials necessary for worship, and address lower level Maslow needs.

⁷ The cuculla is an outer robe worn in worship.

⁸ The senior is the ranking member of the local confraternity. The senior is appointed by the chaplain.

for attendance at the corporate prayer office. When an oblate is not on the property of the Lutheran Campus Center, there is no obligation for attendance at a corporate prayer office offered at the Chapel, but, when practical, the oblate is encouraged to attend.

Oblates are encouraged to invite others (those who are not oblates) to join in the prayer offices. This is especially true when the oblate is entertaining a guest or visitor at the Lutherhaus or the chapel. It shall be understood that an oblate has an obligation to attend (in much the same way as a student has an obligation to attend class), and an invitation so extended to the guest or visitor is an act of hospitality in which the oblate offers to share something of the oblate's life with the guest or visitor.

Chapter IV: Prayer at Meals

Oblates shall pray before the meal and after the meal. Traditionally, the prayer before the meal shall be to ask a blessing, the prayer after the meal to give thanks.

The oblate, when dining alone or in a group where silent private prayer is appropriate, may pray using whatever custom seems good to the oblate. E.g., this may be a favorite family prayer, a prayer from a devotional resource, or an extemporaneous prayer. For those who desire guidance, the meal prayers accompanying Luther's *Small Catechism (SC)* may be used.

When dining with others and prayer is offered by someone else, the oblate shall join in that prayer according to the custom of the place or occasion (e.g., saying, "Amen," at its conclusion), adding silently whatever is lacking (e.g., if thanks is not returned at the conclusion of the meal, doing so silently and without ostentation).

When asked by the host of a meal to lead prayer, the oblate shall not hesitate to do so, demurring only if the honor should fall to someone else in the room. To encourage and set an example of prayer, it may be appropriate on some occasions for an oblate to invite a child to help him/her lead prayer.

When an oblate hosts a meal, the oblate shall not fail to lead prayer. When appropriate, the oblate may invite one of the guests to lead prayer.

If dining as an oblate community, the senior oblate shall lead prayer or appoint someone to do so. Should the senior oblate forget, any oblate may gently remind the senior of his/her obligation being careful not to cause embarrassment before guests if any be in attendance.

Chapter V: Common Meals

The oblates shall join in common meal at least once per week. The timing of this meal and duties related to the meal shall be assigned by the little chapter. While it is understood that class, extra-curricular, and work schedules militate against common meals, oblates are nevertheless encouraged to take meals in common as often as is practical.⁹

⁹ "Impractical" does not apply to all expressions of individual freedom. This is the greatest challenge to life in community in the present age. We have become so accustomed to the highest degrees of autonomy that we think the suborning of autonomy for the sake of community perverse. It shall be considered an advance in sanctification if the oblates learn to accommodate their fellow oblates, compromise, and, when appropriate, sacrifice. Class, work, extra-curricular and other activities related to the academic goals of the university are reasonable grounds to absent oneself from a community activity. Simple preference is not (e.g., preferring to eat late in the evening is

At the appointed time for a common meal, all shall gather, standing at their places, a blessing shall be said (*supra*), and the meal shall commence. At the conclusion of the meal, any necessary announcements shall be made. Then, all shall rise, and a thanksgiving shall be said (*supra*).

At common meals, oblates shall present no barrier to communication with their fellows at table; phones, computers, private books, etc. are not permitted at table unless such is necessary for emergency communication (e.g., someone is a member of the fire department or a relative is having surgery). At some common meals, silence may be desired.¹⁰

A common meal is an appropriate time for an edifying reading.¹¹ When a reading is presented, either a recording (e.g., a book on tape) may be used or one of the oblates may assume the role of reader. The reading need not occupy the entire meal time. During the reading, silence shall be maintained.

Chapter VI: Retreats

Oblates shall make, at least, an annual retreat to St. Augustine's House. This requirement may be dispensed by the chaplain. Novices shall make a retreat to St. Augustine's House prior to completion of the novitiate. Postulants are encouraged to make a retreat to St. Augustine's House.¹²

Chapter VII: The Little Chapter and Lutherhaus Meeting

Residents of the Lutherhaus shall meet, at least, weekly to discuss matters related to the oblates and the Lutherhaus, the senior or his/her designee presiding.¹³ A portion of this customary, the *Rule of St. Benedict*, or some other manual applicable to oblature and/or life in community shall be read at every

not sufficient grounds for absenting oneself from a common meal if early in the afternoon is physically possible for everyone and preferred by most).

¹⁰ There is probably no more difficult question surrounding the common meal than the question of silence. Within the traditional Benedictine community, silence at meals is the norm for all days other than (high) feast days. Silence at meals was commended for three reasons: 1) the general benefit that silence brings with respect to openness to God; 2) the practical necessity of being able to hear the mealtime reading; 3) the belief that idle chatter was a spiritual danger. It is certainly true that living in close quarters for extended periods of time can be difficult. Not having to talk with your neighbor can be a blessing. The Lutherhaus, however, is not a traditional monastery. Residents are not facing a lifetime of cohabitation. Furthermore, nowhere near every meal is being taken together, and most work is independent. It is assumed that being able to converse at table will foster Christian community. Nevertheless, periodic silent meals may prove beneficial. The residents should, from time to time, engage in the more traditional discipline. Understand also that the silent meal is not really silent. While those dining do not engage in casual conversation, a reading is offered. As an alternative to a reading, music (of an edifying nature, e.g., Bach's Christmas Cantata or a recording of shape note hymns) may be played. Necessary conversation (e.g., "the bananas foster has set the centerpiece on fire") is not prohibited; discussing WVU's upcoming football game is not a necessary conversation.

¹¹ Some seasons or times (e.g., Lent) may provide extra justification for a reading.

¹² St. Augustine's House is located in Oxford, MI, less than 400 miles from WVU. Chap. Riegel makes frequent trips to St. Augustine's, and special trips (e.g., spring break or just before or after a semester) are easily arranged. Nothing prevents individuals or small group from arranging a trip of their own at their convenience.

¹³ The parliamentary authority for the little chapter shall be RRONR, attest edition, unless replaced with some other parliamentary authority by the confraternity.

regular little chapter. The little chapter is an appropriate place to assign chores, etc.. Non-resident oblates may attend this meeting.¹⁴

Chapter VIII: The Dining Room of the Lutherhaus

The dining room shall be used for dining unless preempted by a whole-house activity. Personal items shall not be stored in the dining room or left unattended in such a way as to infringe upon the enjoyment of the dining room by others. If an oblate is hosting a meal or otherwise entertaining in the dining room in such manner as it would deprive another oblate of seating or present an uncomfortable social situation, the hosting oblate shall request permission at a little chapter prior to the event.

Chapter IX: The Living Room of the Lutherhaus

The living room is an appropriate place for study and relaxation. Personal items shall not be stored in the living room or left unattended in such a way as to infringe upon the enjoyment of the living room by others. If an oblate is entertaining in the living room in such manner as it would deprive another oblate of seating or present an uncomfortable social situation, the hosting oblate shall request permission at a little chapter prior to the event.

Chapter X: The Kitchen of the Lutherhaus

The kitchen shall be kept clean and orderly at all times. Immediately following a meal, all dishes, utensils, and cookware shall be cleaned, dried, and stored. Food shall be stored in such a manner as not to attract rodents or other pests. The little chapter shall assign storage shelves and refrigerator/freezer space. As it is assumed that most meals will not be taken in common, the little chapter shall resolve any conflicts that arise related to the scheduling of kitchen use.

Chapter XI: The Porch of the Lutherhaus

Personal items shall not be stored on the porch or left unattended in such a way as to infringe upon the enjoyment of the porch room by others. Food shall be stored in such a manner as not to attract rodents or other pests.

Chapter XII: The Laundry of the Lutherhaus

The laundry shall be kept clean and orderly at all times. Personal items related to the use of the laundry may be kept in the bathroom by agreement with the housemates.

Chapter XIII: The Bathrooms of the Lutherhaus

The bathrooms shall be kept clean and orderly at all times. Personal items related to the use of the bathroom may be kept in the bathroom by agreement with the housemates who share that bathroom.

Chapter XIV: The Bedrooms of the Lutherhaus

¹⁴ It is not anticipated that there will be a great number of non-resident oblates in the near future, but that is a goal of the Lutheran Campus Foundation, by consensus of the working group of the Board of Directors held in the winter of 2014. When the number of non-residents grows, we shall have to rewrite the customary to reflect the larger oblate community. The most likely amendment would be to separate the Lutherhaus meeting from the little chapter such that the little chapter shall be for all the oblates and the house meeting for the residents only. Even if there are only a few non-resident oblates, care should be taken to hold, at minimum, monthly meetings of the entire confraternity. Such meetings could be organized around a common meal and corporate worship (e.g., a regular Sunday evening mass or a special vespers hosted by the confraternity).

Residents shall be mindful of their housemates, being neither noisy nor malodorous. Safe and clear egress to both door and window shall be maintained.

Chapter XV: Resident Oblates and Guests

Residency in the Lutherhaus shall be tied to membership in the confraternity. As such residents shall have made oblature, becoming oblates of St. Benedict through the Congregation of the Servants of Christ, or shall be in the process of so doing. Thus, novice oblates and postulant oblates¹⁵ may also be admitted as residents.

When an oblate, novice oblate, or postulant oblate is no longer affiliated with the confraternity (by renunciation or revocation) residency shall be terminated. The chaplain may extend guest residency so as not to interfere with academic semester.

Additionally, guests of the Lutherhaus may be admitted to residency at the discretion of the chaplain. Such residency shall be reviewed on a semester basis. Guest residency may be terminated if the presence of the guest or the guest's deportment or adherence to the customary is counterproductive to the life of the confraternity.

Residents and guests alike shall follow all chapters of this customary related to the regulation of the Lutherhaus.

Chapter XVI: Postulancy¹⁶

A person desiring membership in the confraternity may be asked to enter a time of discernment (traditionally known as postulancy). During this time, the postulant shall study the customary, the *Small Catechism*, and other materials with an eye to making informed resolutions upon entrance into the novitiate. At the same time, the postulant shall adopt, over time, the customary's disciplines, as is practical, again, with an eye to making informed resolutions upon entrance into the novitiate. During postulancy, the confraternity shall assist the postulant in the discernment process.

Admission into postulancy is at the discretion of the confraternity. A candidate for postulancy shall submit a written petition¹⁷ to the confraternity. Upon receipt of the petition, the confraternity shall determine the readiness of the candidate for postulancy. If it is determined that candidate is ready, the confraternity shall inform the candidate and appoint a time for the formal beginning of postulancy through a public ceremony.

The public ceremony for the beginning of postulancy shall normally take place at a chapel mass. The elements shall include an explanation of postulancy and the underlying objective of the confraternity. The candidate shall be questioned as to his/her sincerity in seeking postulancy and willingness to learn what oblature entails through study and practice. Upon affirmation by the candidate, the candidate shall

¹⁵ A "novice oblate" has not yet made regular oblature. He/she is in a period of formation and discernment. A "postulant oblate" has not yet made the novice oblature. As such, he/she is also in a period of formation and discernment, but full adherence to the customary is not required.

¹⁶ These final chapters serve as an interim customary until the Congregation of the Servants of Christ ratifies its oblate customary.

¹⁷ This petition need not be lengthy. It is a simple letter wherein the postulant candidate expresses his/her desire to explore the possibility of membership in the confraternity and declare his/her willingness to enter into a discernment process that will involve study and experience of the disciplines of the confraternity.

be blessed and declared a postulant. Prayers shall then be offered for the new oblate and the confraternity.

The confraternity may revoke postulancy. The postulant may renounce postulancy. Upon termination of postulancy, the postulant shall return to the confraternity any symbols of postulancy or materials provided by the confraternity as part of postulancy.

Normally, postulancy shall last no longer than a few months, but the confraternity may extend postulancy to allow for additional discernment.

Postulancy may be waived by the confraternity.

Chapter XVII: Novitiate

A person desiring membership in the confraternity shall enter a novitiate of no less than one year for the sake of formation. During this time, the novice shall study the customary, the *Large Catechism*, *The Rule of S. Benedict*, and other materials with an eye to making informed resolutions upon oblature. At the same time, the postulant shall adopt, over time, the customary's disciplines, as is practical, again, with an eye to making informed resolutions upon oblature. The confraternity shall assist the novice in his/her formation.

Admission into the novitiate is at the discretion of the confraternity. A candidate for the novitiate shall submit a written petition¹⁸ to the confraternity. Upon receipt of the petition, the confraternity shall determine the readiness of the candidate for the novitiate. If it is determined that candidate is ready, the confraternity shall inform the candidate and appoint a time for the formal beginning of the novitiate through a public ceremony.

The public ceremony for the beginning of novitiate shall normally take place at a chapel mass. The elements shall include an explanation of the novitiate and the underlying objective of the confraternity. The candidate shall be questioned as to his/her sincerity in seeking the novitiate and willingness to be formed for oblature through study and practice. Upon affirmation by the candidate, the candidate shall be blessed and declared a novice. Prayers shall then be offered for the new novice and the confraternity.

The confraternity may revoke the novitiate. The novice may renounce the novitiate. Upon termination of the novitiate, the novice shall return to the confraternity any symbols of the novitiate or materials provided by the confraternity as part of novitiate.

Normally, the novitiate shall last one year, but the confraternity may extend the novitiate to allow for additional discernment.

Chapter XVIII: Oblation

¹⁸ This petition need not be lengthy. It is a simple letter wherein the novice candidate expresses his/her desire, willingness, and commitment to enter into the process of formation preparatory to oblature.

A person, having been a novice for the requisite period of time, desiring to make oblation shall submit a written petition¹⁹ to the confraternity. Upon receipt of the petition, the confraternity shall determine the readiness of the candidate for the oblation. If it is determined that candidate is ready, the confraternity shall inform the candidate and appoint a time for the formal beginning of the novitiate through a public ceremony. Admission to the confraternity as an oblate is at the discretion of the confraternity.

The public ceremony of oblation shall normally take place at a chapel mass. The elements shall include an explanation of oblation and the underlying objective of the confraternity. The candidate shall be questioned as to his/her sincerity in making oblation and willingness to abide by the customary. The candidate shall sign the resolutions of oblation. Upon affirmation and signing by the candidate, the candidate shall be blessed and declared an oblate. Prayers shall then be offered for the new oblate and the confraternity.

Oblate may renounce oblation, a written resignation being required. An oblate may also be removed from the confraternity by the confraternity for departure from the customary. Upon termination of the novitiate, the novice shall return to the confraternity any symbols of the novitiate or materials provided by the confraternity as part of novitiate.

¹⁹ This petition need not be lengthy. It is a simple letter wherein the novice expresses his/her desire, willingness, and commitment to live according to the resolutions of oblation.