



THE COMPANION

June 2025

The Newsletter of The Companions of St. Luke — An Offering

Welcome to the 2025 second-quarter edition of “The Companion.” This issue focuses on convocations, past and present. Thanks to all our brothers and sisters who contributed. Without you there is no newsletter. Thank you also for allowing us to gently edit your pieces. Your newsletter editorial staff has expanded. Joining Br John David are Br Gregory, Br Jérôme, and Jason Lentz. We hope you will be blessed by our efforts; and please, we solicit your comments and feedback. We can only get better with your help.

Publisher: Abbess Martha

Editorial Consultant: Sr Julian

Editorial Staff: Br John David, Br Gregory, Br Jérôme, and Jason Lentz

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UPCOMING CONVOCATION DETAILS



Convocation 2025 , July 21–July 25, @ St Benedict Center, Schuyler, NE

Those flying into Omaha will be staying at “EVEN Hotel Omaha Downtown - Old Market, an IHG property.” The hotel phone number is 1-855-TRY-EVEN (1-855-879-3836). Contact <https://www.ihg.com/evenhotels/hotels/us/en/omaha/omadt/hoteldetail>. The cost of rooms in July should be in the vicinity of \$91-\$116. Be advised that rooms are already somewhat limited. You are encouraged to make your reservations as soon as you can. If you are making plane reservations, please plan to arrive on Sunday, July 20, 2025. The hotel has free shuttle service from the airport and an on-site restaurant, that closes at 10 p.m.

The limo to the retreat center will pick us up from this hotel on Monday, July 21 at 12 noon sharp. Concerning our departure on Friday, July 25: the limo will depart the

retreat center for the airport at 10 a.m. Contact Sr Madeleine Sophie if you need to leave the retreat center earlier than our shuttle. If so, you will need an overnight at a hotel near the airport, with shuttle service to the airport.

Convocation registration is to be completed by June 20 by your filling in a form provided online to all CSL members. *Contact* Sr Madeleine Sophie (rsmith12jm@gmail.com) if you have any questions. (CSL can provide some confidential “help” for those who find the airfare challenging).

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REFLECTIONS on CONVOCATION by Some Life-Professed and Full Oblates

My Convocation Journey

Br Anskar, OSB

When I felt the call and started looking for a monastic community, one of the things that immediately drew me to CSL was the introvert-friendly nature of Benedictine spirituality. The thoughts of hours of private prayer and individual lectio drew me in. What has kept me in CSL is community. I came to realize that I wasn't offering personal prayer so much as joining my voice to a community of people offering the same prayers, in the same way, at roughly the same time. And yes, there is time for personal study and reflection but all of that just goes to make my part of the whole community better. Two memories from past convocations illustrate, I hope, the blessings of community that I have come to understand.

When I showed up for my first convocation, as a guest, I was barely three months sober. I hadn't even begun to understand the power of community in my recovery world, let alone any place else. I was assigned a “Shepherd” who was to help me navigate the ins and outs of Spring Convocation. I got off the bus, grabbed my suitcase from the pile

at the back of the bus, looked around and my shepherd was gone. Some kind brothers and sisters got me up to the dorms, found my name on the list, and helped me get to my room. A frantic search for my shepherd was to no avail. He wasn't in his assigned room nor in any of the common areas, nor was his luggage anywhere to be found. Some began to openly wonder if he had stowed away on the bus and returned to the airport. Several members of the community came by to check on me to make sure I was settling in okay and to offer to help me get to the welcome meeting. The community stepped in without missing a beat to make sure appropriate Benedictine hospitality was being shown to me. (My shepherd did eventually resurface, refreshed from a nap (taken in the wrong room – which is why we couldn't find him)).

My second community memory is from this past convocation. On Thursday night at Compline, I was feeling unwell enough that I couldn't even stand at the places I should have been standing during the office. I stopped by the common room to get something to drink on the way back up to my room and mentioned to the sister standing there that I wasn't feeling well and asked her to just check on me in the morning. She took one look at me and came to the conclusion that "in the morning" wasn't enough. She sent me off to my room and then summoned our in-community nursing team to come check on me. There was a team of people who cared for me, picked up extra office assignments, sent me texts and emails to check on me, brought me meals, and eventually got me back to an airport hotel where I could wait out the final hours necessary to get to "okay to travel safely" status. I was reminded of the humility we are called to, not only in the way we serve but also in the way we allow others to serve us sometimes.

I stay sober today in large part thanks to the community of people walking the recovery path with me. I praise God more fully in large part thanks to the community of people walking the spiritual path with me. I am grateful that God has shown me the power of community!

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My Journey to CSL

Br Steven Olderr, OSB

St. Gregory's Benedictine Abbey is near to Three Rivers, Michigan and about a two-hour drive from the parish in Riverside, IL, where my wife and I had gone for many years. Our rector made a habit of stopping there to unwind before the start of his annual vacation. Copies of their newsletter started showing up in the parish library and there was some interest among the parishioners. The rector was a very good teacher and taking a cue from the interest offered an evening class about monastics and, particularly, Benedictines; interest grew. A visit to the abbey was arranged for a small group of us. It was very pleasant.

Being a small monastery, St. Gregory's offered very little for those wanting to be more involved. We discovered later that the Episcopal Church had established Christian Communities that could be non-residential, could accept both men and women, and offered both the opportunity for oblation as well as solemn profession. It was at this point we discovered several communities within driving distance, one of which was the Companions of St. Luke which had an abbey in Iowa. I arranged a visit for my wife and me, and another woman from church. It was interesting, but none of us were sure it was the right fit for us. There were five or six people at Evening Prayer. We sat in a semi-circle facing the abbot. In the center was a holy water font with a little fountain in it and colored lights in the water. White powder was on the concrete floor from the bubbling water. When it came time to kneel, it was on bare concrete. It was a bit odd. Discussion followed in one of our class meetings back at the parish and the rector asked if we would be interested in forming a Christian Community in our own parish and about ten of us were. The rector got permission from the bishop and in 2003, St. Paul's Benedictine Community was formed with the rector as abbot. We met once a month and worked on formation. By 2008, we were ready to take solemn vows, but for some unknown reason the rector disappeared from the community over our Christmas break.

That is, he never scheduled another meeting. We were mystified, but the rector was not the kind of person one questioned.

There was still a Benedictine discussion group at our parish run by a parishioner, and I switched over to that for two years, but was still seeking more. I decided to check in again with the Companions of St Luke and sent them an email. I got a call from Br. Chad-Anselm Gerns (now known as Br. David) and got filled in on the recent history, which was that the founding abbot had acted inappropriately, was inhibited by the bishop, and then resigned. I was impressed by Br. David being honest about it and thought that it was being handled in a positive fashion, not dwelling on the past but moving forward. One thing led to another and in October of 2010, I became a postulant and was assigned the religious name Br. Joseph by Fr. Wayne Kamm, who was warden of the Companions at the time since a new abbot had not yet been elected. Sr. Bernadette Barrett (later Sr. Helena) was assigned as my formation guide. I have heard people say that formation was a long haul, but I never felt that way. It was fascinating to me to be learning so much and the time seemed to zip by, and in 2016 I was accepted for solemn profession. Unfortunately, by that time it was discovered that I had a birth defect and only had a bicuspid valve in my heart instead of a tricuspid valve, and as they usually do, it clogged up. I was going to die. They replaced the failed valve with a tricuspid valve from a pig.

My new heart valve was taken
From a pig that will never awaken,
Now my stamina's shot,
And when I get hot,
There's a definite odor of bacon.

Okay, the bacon part is not true, but the rest is. Two months later was our convocation and I got clearance from my doctor to attend, although I was still in a weakened

condition. I was not able to attend all the offices, but Abbot Basil was our superior by then and he was a physician, so he understood. Right before we went into the chapel for my solemn profession, I was looking pale and was kind of woozy. Abbot Basil took my pulse and told me to drink some water and I'd be fine. Later I was able to get down on the floor by myself to be covered with the pall, but when I tried to get up Br. David had to pick me up by one arm and Sr. Helena by the other.

Alas, it was an eight-hour trip to get home. Fortunately, my wife was there at the airport to drive me home but I was ready to drop. These days I've learned to pace myself better and can work in the garden for an hour or two, I can walk two miles, ride a bike slowly for five miles, but can't swim, can't run, can't lift more than thirty-five lbs., and long trips are out, which is why I haven't attended a convocation since and probably never will again. But on the other hand, I am still saying my offices, going to church, and am still alive.

(from the editor: "Thanks Be to God").

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Convocation Hosanna Moments

Sr Julian, OSB

"Hosanna" is a plea for salvation and the Hebrew phrase translates as "Pray, save us." In addition to Hosanna being chanted as part of the first Palm Sunday, this word sums up moments from convocations I've attended at Conception Abbey in Missouri from my time as a postulant in 2015 through taking life vows in 2021 and beyond. Below are a few of some "eye-raising" impressions experienced along the Way while preparing for or reflecting on CSL worship and prayer times.



Postulancy. I fondly remember meeting another “newbie” to carpool to our first convocation. Somewhere in Iowa we stopped at a convenience store and bought what we viewed as “our last meal”, since we didn’t know what to expect at the Abbey. ... As I was moving through the food line a day or two later, a senior member asked what I thought of the monastery food. Thinking it may be a trick question or extension of my CSL interview, I paused and said “It’s about what I expected.” ... Later in the week, things got “real” after a couple of members “lay beneath the Pall” as part of their solemn-vows rite of passage. My Protestant eyes got very big, and later that evening, questioning what I was getting into, I looked out my window for an escape route. ... I vividly recall needing several months to process this first convocation!

Novitiate. Undaunted, I returned in the fall and spring for my second and third convocations, having begun to establish the key spiritual practices of praying the Daily Office, Lectio, and writing reflection papers. As a CSL novice, with other St. Paul-based responsibilities, things became a blur and I was somewhat “syllabus-driven” and keenly aware of a pile of what felt like never ending reports and reflection papers. ... A shift occurred when as a novice two (although not a public speaker) I offered to give a homily at my local church for the feast day of St. Benedict. I wore my habit for the first time at my local church and experienced it as an “exterior sign” of my “interior commitment to Christ as a Benedictine”. ... Thankfully, the second year provided more clarity about the connection between my head and my heart; and my reflection papers were sounding less like legal briefs and more like offerings from an emerging monastic.

Annual Profession. After three years, I was so ready for First Profession and excited to begin deeper discernment through more independent study about the implications of taking “life vows”. However, I was not ready for the “dark night of the soul” or angst about committing myself (truly) to God and (authentically) to a dispersed community. ... My mentor, spiritual director, and CSL informal guide saw me through this period;

and, my fellow Companions helped me come to know that individual and collective spiritual salvation are interdependent. In addition, my art project related to the Trinity helped me be more open to I/Thou relationships. These relationships were strengthened by attending CSL convocations that helped me to better know my brothers and sisters in Christ – in person.

Solemn Profession. “Alleluia” (more so than Hosanna) captures how I felt after taking life vows. My life seems to have come into focus; and I can enjoy both peace and freedom in the midst of times of joy and sorrow. This is so despite experiencing two years of intense cancer treatments, the pandemic, and current global chaos and change. ... With the support and love of the CSL and my local communities, I feel blessed. Thanks be to God! Alleluia!

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Reflections on Convocation

Br Daniel, Obl/OSB

I don't remember the year of the first convocation that I attended, but it was at the Priory in Donnelson. I think it was the last one that was held there before we started having them at Conception. I was living in Denmark, Iowa at the time which was just a short drive away and I had been attending prayer at the Priory in the evenings when I could. I had already borrowed a few books on Benedictine life and read them. I had been thinking of becoming an Oblate, but hadn't taken the plunge yet.

What impressed me most about the gathering was the sense of family that everyone had. I wasn't there for very long, maybe a couple of hours, but the laughter and the shared comradery made me feel welcomed and included even though I only knew Joe

(the future Br Florian), Br Thomas, and Prior Michael-John. I had a wonderful shared meal with everyone and the sense that I belonged grew. Maybe this is just what God was calling me to – a community that was stable, to offset the unstable life of a pastor moving from congregation to congregation every few years.

There was a wooden bridge that crossed a small creek on the property, not far from where everything was taking place. I remember I stood there alone for a good bit of time and prayed. Having read the Rule in seminary, and a couple of times since, I was wondering if I could live it out as a 21st century pastor.

As I came back to the gathering, someone I didn't know (who is no longer with the community) came up to me and said, "So, when are you joining us?" And I knew right then that I was. On May 7, 2003, I knelt in the chapel at the Priory and took my vows before Prior Michael- John as an Oblate of the Companions of St Luke as Br Willard. Br Thomas and my wife Denise were there, as well as my mother, who had flown out from Virginia for the occasion. And Bear the dog was there, too. He was the first one to welcome me to the Order when I returned to my seat. He came over and rested his head in my lap. I think about that bridge a lot. I still have a picture of it. Its symbolism is not lost on me. So much has changed in the Order since then, but that sense of family remains. And that is what I cherish most of all.

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Origin Story

Br Florian, Obl/OSB

Brother John David has asked me to supply data on my time with CSL and information on where the bodies are buried at the Donnellson Iowa property. Okay, he didn't say that exactly but that's basically what I heard. I figured I'd better tell all at some point since I am starting to forget all the fun I've had over the years.

First off, I was weird before I got here. I started my journey with CSL on December 31st of 2000, when Father Wayne Kamm invited me to meet some guys for dinner at his house in Salem, Iowa. Wayne and Mary Kamm are excellent cooks and only the very stupid turn down meal offers there.

I met Prior Michael John Austin and Brother Thomas Ferrel while attending the dinner. They along with Brother Martin Sheridan had purchased a 35-acre hobby farm in Lee county Iowa, about 22 miles from Salem a few months prior. They were having some issues which Wayne thought I might be willing to assist them with, both computer and property. ...

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REFLECTIONS on CONVOCATION by An Annually Professed Member

My Convocations

Br John David, OSB

In my visits to Conception Abbey, my favorite time was to walk the mowed path that went around the Abbey property. It passed an apple orchid and two ponds. If you wanted, you could end up at the cemetery near the entrance and read the headstones of the Swiss Benedictines who came over in the 1870s.

I have read that Merton was able to do his contemplative prayer while on walks through the woods near his Kentucky monastery, but that requires long years of experience. I've been doing Contemplative Prayer for about fifteen years, but I have a ways to go yet. While on my Abbey walks, I engaged what the anonymous writer of *The Way of the*

Pilgrim did, repeating the Jesus Prayer and the Hail Mary, over and over. I liked to pause at the benches near the cemetery.

Convocations are always a discovery. There is no substitute for meeting the members in person. Making friends at convo adds immeasurably to the later meetings on Zoom. The dorm at Conception was basic but comfortable. Likewise, the cafeteria was just the essentials.

Thanks to Abbott David, I was a “transfer” from another Order that had offered life profession, which I was led to decline. I was seeking a path where folks were on the same journey, as to praxis. During a social hour after prayers, I met members including Fr Sid for the first time, and with his sardonic wit, he said, “oh yeah, the deserter.” I still laugh at that. He went out of his way to be kind the rest of the week.

My second visit was a little easier and I used the time for walks and was able to wrangle a key to the gym that the monks use. It was just the basics, but I used it twice. That visit sticks in my mind as the word went round that the Superior of Conception Abbey said we could hold services, so long as a woman didn’t lead. (!) I would have packed my bags that day, but wiser heads prevailed, given all the CSL commitments, etc., and we finished that week.

Convocation is an exciting time that new folks might not fully appreciate as, thanks to Abbess Martha and Sr Madeleine Sophie, we will be enjoying new convo sites. The Fall of ’25 is in Baltimore, which for us east coasters will be a drive instead of a flight. Next Fall, perhaps on the West Coast. In case you haven’t ever looked into it, finding a retreat center that can hold us and reasonably supply our needs, is very difficult. Kudos to Sr Madeleine Sophie for her patience and determination. This July, Lord willing, I plan to go to Omaha to take sacred vows. Thanks be to God.

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REFLECTIONS on CONVOCATION by Members in Formation

My First Convocation (Almost)

Br Jérôme, n/OSB



Jacob's Ladder *

Missing my very first convocation in June 2022 was a vivid disappointment—COVID had other plans for me that year. Since then, I've had COVID three more times, and the experiences have blurred together somewhat. I recall that one of those cases may have been a false positive, adding to my confusion. Still, if memory serves, while others gathered in prayer and fellowship, I was at home—isolated, fatigued, and watching the days pass with a sense of longing. I had anticipated that convocation, imagining a sacred pause from the world, a retreat into stillness and spiritual renewal. Missing it felt like missing a rite of passage.

When I finally attended my first convocation the following fall, I arrived with expectations of rest and quiet reflection. What I found was quite different due to so much unexpected activity. Rather than returning home refreshed, I left more tired than when I arrived! Another likely culprit? Vigils with the Catholic monks of Conception Abbey at 6:00 AM. I'm not a morning person, but I rose in the dark each day, drawn by the haunting beauty of their chanting. Their voices, echoing through the chapel in the early light, were so precise and serene that they seemed to beckon the soul to stillness.

And yet, what struck me most wasn't the polished perfection of the monastic liturgy but the contrast it offered to our own Companions' services. Ours are simpler, less rehearsed—humble, yes—but no less sincere. We fill them with love, devotion, and something else I can only describe as “holy warmth.” Until that convocation, I had never spent so much time greeting fellow worshippers during the Peace at the Eucharist; I learned quickly that, at CSL, everyone needed a hug and a greeting. It wasn't just a gesture but a moment of genuine connection, a sacred exchange among friends who had become family.

Indeed, now, convocations feel like family reunions. I count down the days. I pack early. I arrive eager but strive to keep my excitement at bay and to achieve a contemplative mood during the trip. There's something profoundly moving about praising God in so many ways—through chant, silence, laughter, shared meals, shared joys and burdens. Each expression seems valid to me. Whether trained or trembling, each voice adds to the chorus of praise. And in that diversity, I've come to see a fuller picture of the God we worship—one who delights in every note, every heart, every offering. As Saint Benedict wrote, “... if we want to reach the highest summit of humility, if we desire to attain speedily that exaltation in heaven to which we climb by the humility of this present life, then by our ascending actions we must set up that ladder on which Jacob in a dream saw angels descending and ascending (Gen 28:12).” ** In our humble, heartfelt worship, we climb that ladder—not so much by striving upward, but by quietly offering ourselves in love, step by step.

* “Jacob's Ladder” was downloaded from the web page www.crosswalk.com (no author attribution) on May 23, 2025.

** Timothy Fry (Ed.). *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (7.5-6). Liturgical Press, 1980 (32)

My First Convocation

Br Ronan, n/OSB

I remember my first Convocation, which wasn't really that long ago. It was June of 2022. I remember waking up on Sunday morning preparing to leave for Convocation with butterflies in my stomach. At times, I can suffer from a bit of social anxiety, so the idea of all of these new people made me a bit nervous. I was driving to Conception from my home in Indianapolis. I had a bit of consolation knowing that a fellow Aspirant, Br. Jérôme, would be meeting me there. Br. Jérôme would be entering as a Postulant at the same time.

While I was driving across the Midwest, I joined our last Education for Ministry (EfM) meeting for the year virtually from the car. I heard Br. Jérôme on the call as well, and the news I received made my stomach drop; he had COVID and would not be making the trip. This news didn't make me turn the car around, but it definitely made me a bit uneasy. Later, I would find out the rest of my Postulant Cohort (there were and still are four of us) were not going to be able to make it either.

Luckily this news wouldn't be known to me until later. After a nine-hour car ride, I made it safely to Conception Abbey. I didn't know that there would be food available that night, but with having a nervous stomach already, I really wasn't that hungry, so I just got to bed early. I did get an email stating that folks would meet in the morning for breakfast, so I was excited to finally meet some people. When I made it down to the cafeteria, I met Sr. Mary Mary Magdalene, Sr. Madeleine Sophie, and Abbess Martha (then Sr. Martha) for the first time in person. They really helped to make me feel welcome. I was able to help get things set up for the Community to arrive later that day. As the day went on my nerves melted away. I met more and more members of the Community and everyone was so welcoming.

I'm so thankful that God gave me the strength to overcome my anxiety and make the leap to hop in the car that early Sunday morning. I would later that week make the realization that God had brought me to a family that I hadn't known I was missing, but was so happy to have found.

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Holding Our Breath

Br Joseph Elias, n/OSB

When I was a small child, I had to learn to swim in a nearby lake, and then later, as my family took longer vacations, in the Atlantic Ocean. I had to learn to hold my breath at times. Not always easy.

In my early days as a member of CSL (not so long ago), I imagined I would need to learn how to “hold my spiritual breath” between our spring and fall convocations. How could we be a “community” when we are dispersed in such distant places? Could “community” survive the distances?

I have learned the answer is YES! To be sure, when we physically gather for our Convocations, the fellowship is a sweet treasure. Not only do we pray together, but the sharing of everyday meals, long walks for those that are interested, meals shared, and, at times, precious laughter help flesh out what it means for us to be a Benedictine community. Yet even while we are a dispersed community, we have the Breath of the Spirit as we pray the Divine Office, faithfully practice Lectio Divina, interact with our formation guides and one another, meet on Zoom and do our mutual formation work, etc.

In this daily life, we discover that the Holy Spirit is more than able to keep us in Communion with Christ and in Community with one another. We can breathe in deeply the breath of God.

May we continue to be prayerful as we continue our spiritual practices and strengthen these precious bonds. Scripture says that the “love of Christ constrains us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). I’m sure that in this life, God is able “to do for us far more that we can ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20).

Christ’s Spirit breathes new life into us daily through Word and Sacrament, service, and prayer, helping us to not only survive but thrive (!) as The Companions of Saint Luke, Order of Saint Benedict.

May more siblings in Christ find their way to us! And may we, as St. Benedict teaches us, “prefer nothing to Christ,” who will “bring us all to everlasting life.”

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GUEST PRAYER

A Meditation about Following Jesus

Br Daniel-Joseph, OSB-CG

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

(Matthew 16:24-25)

Jesus invites us to follow him – an invitation that can be accepted or rejected. To follow Jesus means we need to be empty of ourselves, ready to receive what he has to offer. This can only happen if we allow our false-self ego to diminish – “to die” – and give our True Self room to grow in love. This is what it means to lose our life to find it.

It means allowing the heart connections with people, and with nature, to grow. It means learning to see deeply, past our own shortcomings, and past those of others, to look into the hearts of life everywhere. It means to listen to the words of others, and to listen for what has not been said, to reach people at their point of need. We work to allow dignity for all, building respect and ensuring equity.

To follow Jesus binds us to his Word, but also releases us from the bondage of pride, power, privilege, prejudice, and other false gods. We no longer have to justify our choices, because our guidance comes from the Holy Spirit to love, share, and care as Jesus did. Our path has already been selected to follow the love and life of Christ.

And the trees call again, “It’s simple,” they say, “and you too have to come into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine.”

- Mary Oliver, *When I Am Among the Trees*

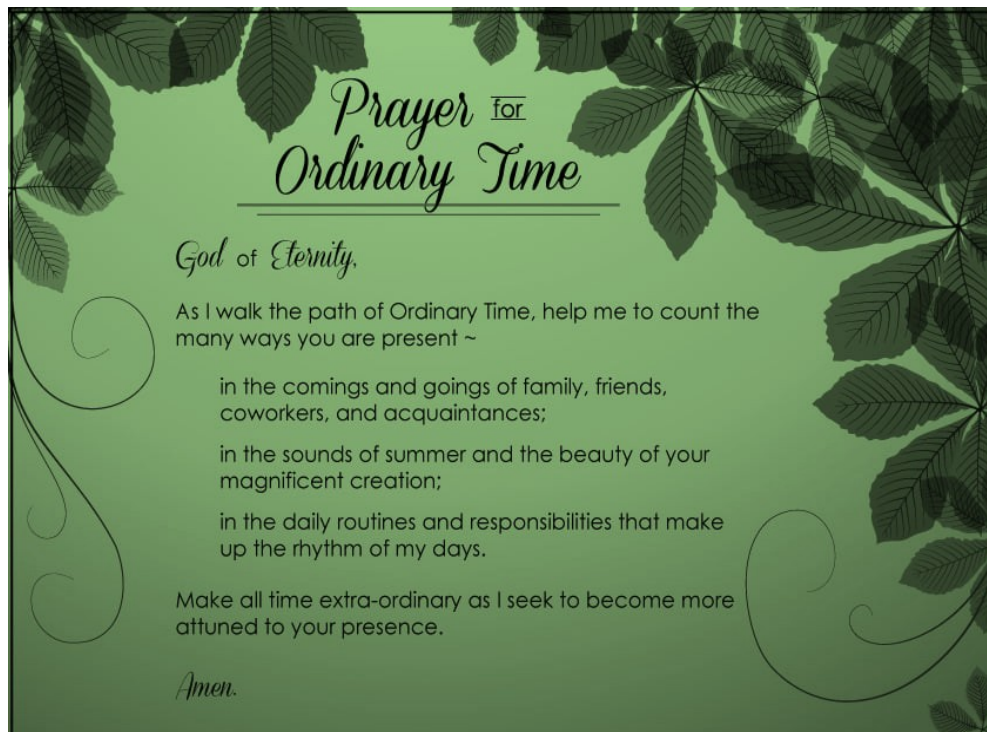
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Upcoming Events

- *Council Meetings* – Generally, every second Tuesday of each month @ 5pm CDT. All members are welcome to attend. Councilmembers are noted in CSL’s Directory.
- *Convocation* – July 21-25 at St. Benedict Center, Schuyler, NE.

- *Summer Study Program* – Begins July 1, 2025 on the topic of **Humility**. Group sessions on 8/3, 8/10, and 8/17. More details to come via Sr Genevieve Lynn.
- *Safe Church Training* – To be organized in August. Info TBA by Sr Genevieve Lynn.

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(Image downloaded from <https://www.sadlier.com/religion/blog/bid/95199/ordinary-time>)
