



Judi Taylor, Beate Steller, Fr Laurence Freeman, Derek Steller and Paul Taylor – at our final oblation at Bonnevaux Centre for Peace, September 2023.

Why we became Oblates

by Beate and Derek Steller

It was in Shantivanam, Fr Bede Griffith's ashram in India, that we learned of Christian mediation over thirty years ago. Each morning and evening we sat on the banks of the Cauvery River learning to say our mantra and listening to the wisdom of John Main.

We were travelling for a year after getting married and were visiting intentional communities to see if we were drawn to any of them. We had no idea that 33 years later we would be at the Bonnevaux Centre for Peace, taking sacred promises to support and grow as part of the world-wide WCCM oblate community. We were in this beautiful sacred place, connecting with the spirit of Bede Griffith and with a contemplative community with a vision broad enough to encompass the traditions of East and West. So how did we end up here?

On returning from our year of travel we quickly settled into the 'householder' stage of life with a young family. We continued to meditate most days and formed our own small community during the years of raising children. Jamberoo Abbey south of Sydney was a precious spiritual oasis for us during these years, giving us a space for renewal in the business of life. It was only when our boys finished school that we felt a natural drawing to meditate with others. We joined local meditation groups and by chance heard of the Interfaith meditation group in North Sydney that Paul and Judi Taylor were convening. Paul and Judi have been wonderful friends and role-models

as oblates over the past 10 years. We learned of the oblate path through them, however we each have different stories on how we came to decide to become oblates.

Beate's story began with her time at Shantivanam several years before meeting Derek... "I was in my early 20s when I went to India and spent a long time at the ashram. This was a life changing experience in which my personal and spiritual world was opening to new ways of seeing. Although I continued to be connected to the Benedictine tradition for a long time, I have now come to a point in my life where I want to take it deeper and grow further. So now, 40 years later, through the joys and pains of life, discovering the gift of motherhood and learning through leaning into life itself, I feel I'm returning to a more serious, committed spiritual path in becoming an oblate with WCCM. To take this step together with Derek has been especially profound for me. We are supporting each other on our journey and consciously share a commitment of stability, obedience and conversion through the practices of meditation, spiritual reading, and service for God. As I described my experience at the Oblation ceremony; 'becoming an oblate with WCCM has been a journey of home-coming'."

Derek's journey towards becoming an oblate goes back five years to an intense inner conflict relating to work direction... "In the midst of the conflict I had a sense of being called to surrender to the Divine more deeply. While self-surrender is the work of a lifetime (still in progress!)

what's grown within me over this time is the deepening sense that my spiritual life is less about myself as an individual, and more about a service to something beyond me that is growing in the world. I am drawn to be a part of this process and to support it in some small way.

Being of service is primarily about doing the inner work of meditation and transformation. The calling to the oblate path comes out of this and has emerged as an outer structure or form to support it. In the oblate community we can join together with others who have the same purpose and intention of bringing meditation into the world, and God willing, as an energy that can change the world."

Over the past two years we entered the process of formation as oblates within the Sydney cell group and with our mentors. We came to Bonnevaux to volunteer in the community as a part of this formation and were delighted to have the opportunity to receive our final oblation with Fr Laurence and the community there. While we don't know what the future holds, we both feel that the sacred promises we have taken as oblates have launched us on a new life path.

In taking this journey, we are very grateful to our mentors, Anne-Marie Doecke and Barb Hoare for their encouragement and wisdom, and to Judi and Paul Taylor for their example of living a dedicated oblate life. We have also greatly appreciated the support of Gloria Duffy, the National Oblate coordinator, and the gentle and kind guidance of the Sydney Cell Group.