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[Features](#), [Local News](#)

## Third orders offer lay Catholics spirituality, ‘sense of community’

by [Guest Writer](#) • June 12, 2013

Laura K. Brestovansky | *Special to the Michigan Catholic*



Al Knasinski (front row, tan shirt and shorts) and others make their commitments as oblates at the Benedictine Monastery in Oxford. Knasinski says belonging to a third order has made him more humble and brought him closer to Christ.

Dryden — Margaret “Peggy” Fillmore was a cradle Catholic, and a good practicing Catholic, she said, as she clutched the Tau pendant she wore. But she began to wonder if there was something more to her faith.

Even though Fillmore attended daily Mass and was very active in her parish, St. Cornelius in Dryden, it didn’t seem to be enough. Then she learned about third orders, specifically the Secular Franciscans. “I heard a talk on Franciscan spirituality, and all the lights went on,” she said.

Fillmore is one of thousands who have found fulfillment in a third order — an organization for lay men and women to participate in the spiritual life of a religious order, as opposed to first orders (for priests) and second orders (for religious brothers and sisters). Members of third orders, sometimes called lay or secular members or oblates, are called to bring Christ to their corner of the world, albeit in a “hidden” way.

### Similar yet different

Most third orders have regular formation meetings to teach members about their history and spirituality. Members pray portions of the Liturgy of the Hours (the daily prayer of the Church) and attend daily Mass as their job and family duties allow. The members of some orders wear a particular cross or scapular at meetings and are encouraged to take part in ministry, such as bringing Holy Communion to the homebound or teaching religious education.

Each order has its own spirituality. Secular Franciscans are known for corporal works of mercy in service to the Church, such as feeding the poor or nursing the sick. Carmelite orders are devoted to contemplation and mental prayer. Benedictines are committed to unity with God and each other, as well as a balanced life involving prayer and service. Dominicans are known for study and preaching.

Al Knasinski, a Benedictine oblate from Lapeer, says the nearly 30 oblates affiliated with the St. Benedict Monastery in Oxford are all engaged in some form of ministry, both independently and as a group. Knasinski, an automotive robotics engineer, sometimes finds himself ministering to his coworkers, who are attracted to the Benedictine cross he wears, he said.

“When I first started wearing it, I got a lot of ribbing,” he said. “They’d say, ‘Gotta clean up the language now, Father Al’s here’ — that kind of thing. But now, there are certain people who will come to me that are spiritually in need of help.”

To join a third order, potential members usually attend several formation meetings before professing to follow the order’s rule. Although no solemn vows are taken, typically, a temporary promise is followed later by a definitive, lifelong one. There is no penalty to discontinue membership with an order, but after the final promise, members may need a dispensation from the Vatican to do so. Most orders have provisions to excuse members who are elderly or ill.

### Challenges

Life in a third order isn’t always easy, members say. Daily prayer and study can be difficult to fit into everyday life, along with meetings, ministry and additional days of fasting. Sometimes the order’s spirituality brings out personal qualities that need to be changed or improved upon — at a cost.

“For me, it’s humility,” Knasinski said. “St. Benedict’s teachings are very stringent about humility. My humility is a work in progress with frequent setbacks. Oblates strive to have no class structure over each other. It’s also a challenge keeping up with the life when I’m working up to 50 hours a week — being a representative of St. Benedict and of the Catholic Church.”

Why Third Orders?

But Fillmore says for all the challenges, it’s the “sense of community” that makes belonging to a third order worthwhile. “I have lots of very good friends,” she said.

Another benefit, Fillmore said, is becoming more committed to her prayer life and an increased interest in the readings at Mass. “I grab my Bible” to go find the context of particular passages, she said. “I never would have done that before.”

Knasinski added, “It’s a continual journey of faith with people who are on journeys like mine. ... I am far more spiritual than I ever was before. Maybe 10 years ago, in my career, I was called a bit hot-headed. I hope that’s not so much the case now.”

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Laura K. Brestovansky is a freelance writer and Third Order Secular Discalced Carmelite, preparing to make her definitive promise.

## **Local third order communities**

### ***Benedictine Oblates***

Benedictine Monastery

2711 E. Drahner Road, Oxford Township

(248) 628-2249

[oblates@benedictinemonks.com](mailto:oblates@benedictinemonks.com)

Benedictines are committed to unity with God and each other, as well as a balanced life involving prayer and service.

### ***Lay Dominicans***

Blessed Sacrament Monastery

29575 Middlebelt Road, Farmington Hills

(248) 626-8253

[dominicanlaity.ning.com](http://dominicanlaity.ning.com)

Dominicans have the charism of studying and preaching.

### ***Secular Franciscans***

St. Bonaventure Secular  
Franciscans

1780 Mt. Elliott, Detroit

(313) 579-2100, Ext. 136

[www.sfbonaventure-detroit.org/Contact/about.htm](http://www.sfbonaventure-detroit.org/Contact/about.htm)

Secular Franciscans are known for corporal works of mercy such as feeding the hungry and aiding the sick.

### ***Third Order Secular Discalced Carmelites***

Several exist in Metro Detroit, but refer to [www.ocdswashprov.org](http://www.ocdswashprov.org) for more information.  
Carmelite third orders are typically devoted to contemplation and mental prayer.