

Glossary of Monastic Terms

Monastic Offices

These terms described types of monks and administrative offices of religious who are living in community under the order of a superior. Occupations that indicate a specialty craft, such as scribe, brewer, mason, are not included.



- **Abbot** — Head of a major monastery designated as an 'Abbey' who has been elected by professed monks and consecrated by a bishop.
- **Prior** — Ecclesiastical title for a religious superior or head of a monastery, ranking somewhat lower than an abbot.
- **Chamberlain** — Assistant to the Abbot or Prior who is in charge of the finances and household accounts.
- **Superior** — The person to whom a cleric or monk is responsible to under canon law. Can be an Abbot, Prior, Bishop, Mother superior, or other official.
- **Prelate** — General name for a member of the church hierarchy who has a rank commensurate with a bishop, abbot, or religious superior.
- **Obedientiary** — Monk who is appointed by an abbot or prior to an office with specific responsibilities. Some of these offices include:
 - **Almoner** — Church or monastery official who is in charge of distributing money to the poor.
 - **Archivist** — Preserver of important records including documents of both ecclesiastical and historical importance.
 - **Cantor** — Music director and instructor of a monastery, in charge of the choir and liturgical accompaniment.
 - **Cellarer** — Charged with tending to a monastery's food supply, especially including beer and ale.
 - **Dean** — In early monastic use, a dean was appointed to supervise ten brother monks. In later usage dean refers to the head administrator of a chapter.
 - **Porter** — Appointed to guard the gate of a monastery, admit guests, and interact with the public.
 - **Sacristan** — Charged with the care of the church and the vessels, vestments, and furnishings used for mass or worship.
- **Monk** — One who practices religious 'asceticism' and renounces worldly goods in order to devote oneself to spiritual work.
- **Choirmonk** — Ordained Monks or seminaries who attended to sacramental ministries, liturgy and studies, and are required to recite the Divine Office .
- **Lay Brother** — Monks who have not been ordained, and who to sacramental ministries, liturgy and studies. Now commonly referred to as 'Religious'.

Other Religious States

These terms refer to religious or laymen who adopt an ascetic lifestyle and are associated with religious institutions, but who are not properly called monks.

- **Anchorite** — Religious ascetic living in seclusion, similar to a hermit but bound by vows and usually attached to a church or bishop.
- **Ascetic** — An ascetic is one whose lifestyle is characterized by abstaining from worldly pleasures.
- **Canons Regular** — Priests living in community, usually under the Rule of St. Augustine, engaging in public ministry, and bound to a particular place or church. Often associated with Cathedrals or Great Churches.
- **Clerics Regular** — Priests living in community, engaged in public ministry, bound by vows specific to the order, but not bound by place. Jesuits are most notable order.
- **Friar** — Member of a mendicant order who is under a religious superior, but is not affiliated with a permanent monastery.
- **Hermit** — One who lives in seclusion from society out of a religious conviction. Lifestyle of a hermit is 'Eremitic'.
- **Mendicant Order** — Religious orders of ascetics who live by charity rather than establishing permanent monasteries and accumulating wealth.
- **Oblate** — Lay persons, clergy, or minors who are affiliated with a religious community but who are not professed members.
- **Nun** — Woman religious who has taken solemn vows in a religious order. Orders of Nuns are frequently enclosed and dedicated to contemplation and prayer.
- **Sister** — Woman religious who has taken simple vows in a religious congregation that is usually dedicated to service and active vocation.
- **Tertiary** — Lay person who are associated with a mendicant religious order, but do not take vows, *i.e.* 'Third order Franciscan'. Similar to an Oblate.

Monastic Vows and Orders

- **Evangelical Counsels** — Vows of voluntary poverty, chastity, and obedience to a religious superior taken by most religious orders.
- **Public/Private Vows** — Public Vows, whether temporary or permanent, are accepted by a religious superior in the name of the Church. All others are private.
- **Perpetual/Temporary Vows** — Perpetual or permanent vows are taken when a novice is accepted as a professed member of a religious order. Novices typically take temporary or renewable vows.
- **Solemn/Simple Vows** — Solemn vows are made by receiving holy orders or by a public, permanent profession of the rule of a religious institute. All others are simple vows.
- **Vow of Stability** — One of Benedicts original vows, the vow of stability required a monk to permanently associate himself with a particular monastery.
- **Postulant** — Refers to one who is discerning admission to a monastery or religious congregation before being admitted as a novice.
- **Novice** — A prospective member of a religious congregation who is under the rule of a superior and actively being considered for admission.
- **Professed** — Member of a religious order who has taken public, permanent vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

- **Religious Order** — Religious institution where professed members take solemn vows (public and perpetual), and live a life in common.
- **Religious Congregation** — Historically, members of religious congregations took only simple vows, but the distinction between orders and congregations is now blurred.

Other Monastic Terms

- **Cenobitic** — Monastic tradition that stresses community life. Cenobitic monks are usually members of a religious order and live in common in a monastery.
- **Consecrated Life** — Involves public profession of the evangelical counsels either individually (such as an anchorite) as a member of a religious institute.
- **Enclosed (Cloistered)** — Members of enclosed religious orders are dedicated to prayer and contemplation and maintain a strict separation from the outside world.
- **Eremitic** — Monastic tradition, established by the desert fathers, that stresses solitary contemplation and exclusion from society. Now practiced by hermits, anchorites, and the Carthusian order.
- **Mortification** — Penitential act by which one seeks to curb their sinful inclinations. Can include fasting, flagellation, wearing of a hair-shirt, or harsh self-denial.
- **Novitiate** — Period of training, discernment, and preparation that a prospective member of a monastery or religious order undergoes before professing vows.
- **Tonsure** — Shaving most of the hair on a scalp as a sign of religious devotion or humility. Historically practiced for receiving clerical orders or being accepted as a novice in a religious order.

Types of Monasteries

- **Abbey** — Refers to a large monastery that is headed by an Abbot or Abbess, rather than a lower ranking prior or superior.
- **Chartreuse** — Carthusian monastery, organized more like a hermitage than an Abbey. Named after the Carthusian motherhouse in the Chartreuse mountains.
- **Charterhouse** — Anglicized term for a Carthusian monastery. Twelve Charterhouses existed in England before the Reformation.
- **Convent** — Community of priests, religious brothers, or nuns, but the term is often used to refer to the building used by the community.
- **Hermitage** — Place or settlement where an individual or group of religious live in seclusion.
- **Monastery** — Refers to the residence and workplaces of monks or nuns. A monastery can be extremely small. A large monastery is often an 'Abbey'.
- **Motherhouse** — Designates the principle house or convent of a religious congregation. Residence of the head of a religious order.
- **Priory** — Monastery or convent that is headed by a prior or prioress rather than an abbot or abbess.

Divine Office

The Divine Office, also known as the 'Canonical Hours' or 'Liturgy of the Hours' is the official set of prayers that monks are traditionally required to recite daily. It consists of eight offices, or sets of prayers, hymns, and readings, that are recited — seven during the day and one at night — at approximately three hour intervals. The Divine Office included both 'Ordinary' portions, recited every week at the same time, and 'Proper' portions, which include prayers specific to a feast or season. In the traditional office, the entire book of 150 psalms was completed every week. Its usage traces back to the earliest Christian communities and to a habit of reciting psalms and prayers "seven times a day" that goes back to the Hebrews.

Dramatic changes were made to the Divine office after Vatican II. The entire office was shortened and could be said in the vernacular, many prayers were omitted, the office of Matins was replaced by an 'office of readings', and several of the daytime offices were made optional. For this reason, many traditional orders still use the 1962 Breviary.

During medieval times, the Divine Office was recited or chanted in Latin, so only monks who learned Latin were able to fully participate. Monks who learned Latin, designated as 'choirmonks' were usually ordained and their chief responsibilities were singing mass and chanting the divine office. Lay brothers, who did not know Latin were assigned prayers they could memorize, and many learned parts of the office by heart over time.



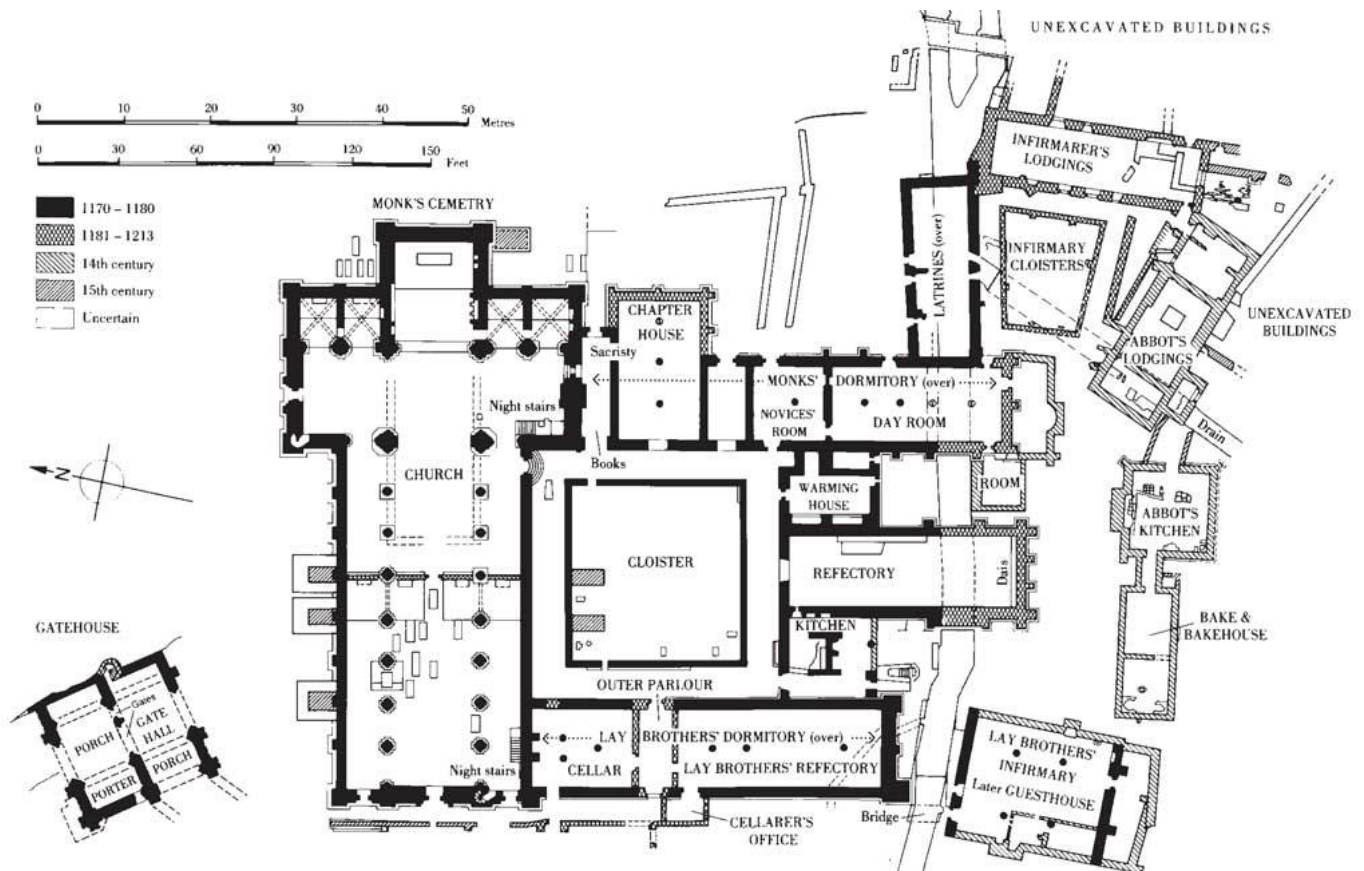
- **Divine Office** — Set of prayers and hymns, recited eight times daily, the monks and religious orders are required to say at approximately three hour intervals.
- **Major Hours** — **Lauds**, said at dawn and focusing on praise, and **Vespers**, focusing on Thanksgiving, are the two longest offices and follow a similar pattern. Lauds is sometime combined with Prime, the first minor hour, and said at dawn.
- **Minor Hours** — The minor hours are shorter than the major offices and include **Prime**, or the first hour (~6 a.m), **Terce**, or third hour (~9 a.m.), **Sext**, or sixth hour (~noon), **None**, or ninth hour (~3 p.m.), and **Compline**, said before retiring (~9 p.m.).
- **Matins** — Monastic nighttime office, including many essential prayers, psalms, and scripture readings. Significantly simplified in 1911 by Pius X and then eliminated altogether by Paul VI after Vatican II.
- **Breviary** — Book containing all the psalms, hymns, prayers and scripture readings necessary for religious who intend to recite the Divine Office.
- **Psalter** — Volume including the Book of Psalms, litanies, and other devotional material.

- **Book of Hours** — Devotional Book, popular during the middle ages, including psalms, prayers, and popular devotions intended for Lay people.,
- **Little Office of Our Lady** — Cycle of prayers, psalms, hymns and readings in honor of the virgin Mary, based on the Canonical Hours, but much simplified. Used by clerics, oblates, and devout lay people in imitation of the Divine Office.
- **Conventual Mass** — Mass celebrated by a congregation of priests or for a community of monks or nuns, that is often associated with the Divine Office.

Monastery Organization

These terms describe rooms or areas of typical monasteries. In addition to the locations listed below, monasteries may be associated a great church or a modest chapel. (See architecture for more details of church facilities). Monasteries also frequently include working areas such as foundries, tanneries, bakeries, and breweries or granaries, barns, and other buildings associated with farming or agriculture. Those in highly populated areas may also contain schools, hospitals, or guest quarters.

The terms listed below refer mainly to rooms or areas within the main buildings of a monastery that contain living and working quarters of the monks, and were common to most cenobitic monasteries of the Middle Ages.



- **Calefactory** — 'Warming Room' where a fire was maintained during cold periods, where monks were free to warm themselves.
- **Cellarium** — Basement area in a monastery, used for storage of food and drink including ale, and wine.
- **Chapter house** — Refers to a large area within a monastery where monks meet to hear talks or announcements, or where synods, or ecclesiastical courts meet.
- **Choir** — Refers to the area in a church, just west of the Sanctuary, where monks sing masses or chant the divine liturgy.
- **Cloister** — Covered walkway in the form of a rectangle running along side the wall of a Cathedral or an Abbey church, opening to monks or nuns living and working quarters.
- **Deanery** — Refers to the offices and living quarters of the administrators of a monastery or religious house.
- **Dormitory** — Building within a monastery containing the cells or sleeping quarters of monks or nuns. Also known as a 'Dorter'
- **Garth** — Rectangular garden in the middle of a cloister, common to medieval monasteries.
- **Infirmary** — Rooms within a monastery where ill and aged monks were cared for.
- **Night Stairs** — Stairway leading directly from the sleeping quarters of monks to the Church or chapel used when doing night offices.
- **Monastic Cell** — Small room used by a monk, nun, hermit or anchorite as a living area and devotional space.
- **Novitiate** — Rooms and living areas within a monastery dedicated to novices so they may keep separate from the professed monks.
- **Oratory** — Refers to a room that is set aside for prayer and liturgy services. In Catholic usage, an oratory is similar to a 'chapel'.
- **Refectory** — Dining hall within a monastery where monks take their meals together. Also known as a 'Frater'.
- **Reredorter** — Latrine or commode area in a monastery, often built at the end of a hall or corridor over a drainage area.
- **Scriptorium** — Well-lit room where monks copied and illuminated books.
- **Sacristy** — Room adjacent to the Sanctuary where vestments, sacred vessels, and other items used during mass were stored.