**CLERGY**

*The following information is for reference purposes only*. This contains summarized historical information on the medieval church and monastery. For any characters that select this Concept, you will be a member of an Order within the church or a monastery. (See Order handout)

**Medieval monasteries in England of the early 13th century.**

**The Different Orders**

The orders differed mainly in the details of their religious observation and how strictly they applied those rules. The major orders that established monastic settlements in Britain were the Benedictines, Cistercians, Cluniacs, Augustinians, Premonstratians, and the Carthusians.

**Daily Life**

Although the details of daily life differed from one order to the next, monastic life was generally one of hard physical work, scholarship and prayer. Some orders encouraged the presence of "lay brothers", monks who did most of the physical labour in the fields and workshops of the monastery so that the full-fledged monks could concentrate on prayer and learning.

**The Daily Grind**

The day of a monk or nun, in theory at least, was regulated by regular prayer services in the abbey church. These services took place every three hours, day and night. When the services were over, monks would be occupied with all the tasks associated with maintaining a self-sustaining community. Abbeys grew their own food, did all their own building, and in some cases, grew quite prosperous doing so. Fountains Abbey and Rievaulx, both in Yorkshire, grew to be enormously wealthy, largely on the basis of raising sheep and selling the wool.

**Learning**

Throughout the Dark Ages and the Medieval period, the monasteries were practically the only repository of scholarship and learning. *The monks were by far the best-educated members of society* - often they were the only educated members of society. Monasteries acted as libraries for ancient manuscripts, and many monks were occupied with laboriously copying sacred texts (generally in a room called the scriptorium).

**The Abbey Hierarchy**

The abbey (the term for a monastery or nunnery) was under the authority of an abbot or abbess. The abbot could be a landless noble, who used the church as a means of social advancement. Under the abbot was the prior/prioress, who ran the monastery in the absence of the abbot, who might have to travel on church business. There could also be a sub-prior. Other officers included the cellerar (in charge of food storage and preparation), and specialists in the care of the sick, building, farming, masonry, and education.

**Pilgrims**

One of the main sources of revenue for monasteries throughout the medieval period were pilgrims. Pilgrims could be induced to come to a monastic house by a number of means, the most common being a religious relic owned by the abbey. Such a relic might be a saint's bone, the blood of Christ, a fragment of the cross, or other similar religious artefacts. The tomb of a particularly saintly person could also become a target for pilgrimages.

**Church Structure**

The Diocese was the administrative territorial unit of the Medieval Church. Administered by a Bishop, it was roughly based on the dioceses established under the Romans. As the Medieval Church became more important, the dioceses received vast domains, often an entire province, and kings gave the bishops the right to govern their domain themselves.

The cathedral was the church of the seat of the diocese. Its priests were at first subjects to the bishops. From the 9th century they lived in clergy houses, or houses close to the cathedral, being subjects to an ecclesiastical rule, similar to that governing the monks, thus their name, canons (subjected to a rule). The ecclesiastical body comprising the canons formed the Chapter.

Generally, a diocese contained several convents of monks. They observed the same rules but each congregation formed an independent abbey, governed by an abbot. The abbey was a complex component of the Medieval Church, and consisted of the lodging of the monks, the residence of the abbot, the church, the hospice (where strangers were lodged), workshops, storehouses, the houses for the domestics and farmers. The abbot governed with the aid of the chapter of monks. In the great convents he also had other dignitaries under him, the provost, his deputy, the chamberlain, in charge of the clothing, the cellarer, in charge of the provisions, the treasurer, the librarian, the chorister, and the director of the school. The regulations of Saint Benedict required labor, and so, the monks were occupied with gardening, watching over the domestics, or making ornaments for the church.

**The Vows of the Benedictine Monks**  
The vows of the Benedictine monks were:

* Obedience
* Stability
* Conversion in the way of life

These vows were the basis of the rule of St. Benedict and the life of Benedictine monks. By the 10th century the Benedictine Rule prevailed everywhere in western Europe including England.

**Benedictine Monks - the Monastic community**  
The life and work of the Benedictine Monks in a monastic community. St. Benedict sought to draw a sharp line between the monastic life and that of the outside world. Hence he required that, as far as possible, each monastery should form an independent, self-supporting community whose Benedictine monks had no need of going beyond its limits for anything. In course of time, as a monastery increased in wealth and number of inmates, it might come to form an enormous establishment, covering many acres and presenting within its massive walls the appearance of a fortified town.

**The Role of the Benedictine Monks in Medieval times**  
The civilizing influence of the Benedictine monks during the early Middle Ages can scarcely be over-emphasized. A monastery was a farm, an inn, a hospital, a school and a library. By the careful cultivation of their lands the monks set an example of good farming wherever they settled. The role of the monasteries and the Benedictine monks was as follows:

* The Benedictine monks received pilgrims and travelers, at a period when western Europe was almost destitute of inns
* The Benedictine monks performed many works of charity, feeding the hungry, healing the sick who were brought to their doors, and distributing their medicines freely to those who needed them
* The Benedictine monks provided education for boys who wished to become priests and those who intended to lead active lives in the world
* The Benedictine monks copied the manuscripts of classical authors, they preserved valuable books that would otherwise have been lost
* The Benedictine monks were the only scholars of the age
* The Benedictine monks kept records of the most striking events of their time and acted as chroniclers of the medieval history of the Middle Ages