



Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.36, 7th October, 2017

“Go and tell the priests that people should come here in procession, and that a chapel should be built here.” This is the message Bernadette received from the “beautiful lady”. Since 1883, Oblate pilgrims have never ceased to come to the grotto of Massabielle in Lourdes to hear the message of conversion and hope which is addressed to them. This year many people were able to share in the pilgrimage by joining with us online for some of the different ceremonies.

During this years Oblate pilgrimage we had many opportunities to encounter that call. In one reflection we were asked, “what is it that Lourdes wants to teach us this year?” For myself the lesson was in the moment when I saw two special members of our sick pilgrims help each other to look up at the Presence of the Lord during the Blessed Sacrament procession. It was a profound witness of the love of God made present and a reminder never to take it for granted.

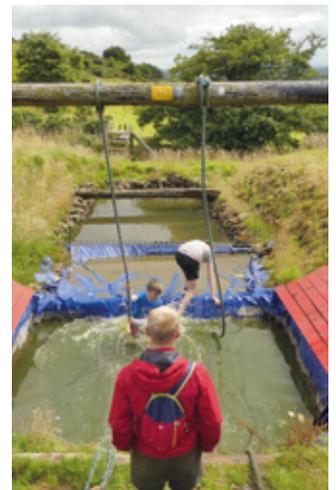
As Pope Benedict once said, ‘the primary purpose of the shrine at Lourdes is to be a place of encounter with God in prayer and a place of service to our brothers and sisters, notably through the welcome given to the sick, the poor and all who suffer. In this place, Mary comes to us as a mother, always open to the needs of her children. Through the light which streams from her face, God’s mercy is made manifest.’

In addition to the story of this year’s pilgrimage, this issue of Connections also shares many more examples of how people are striving to make present the love of God in different ways. No matter where we are, we know that Mary walks with us along the journey of life and always points us toward her Son. It is my prayer that we in the midst of the pressures of daily life we will try to find some silent moments to open our hearts and hear the deep love God has for each and everyone of us.

- Fr. Lorcán O’Reilly OMI

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The Mary of Piety

—Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Devotional prayer to Mary, the mother of Jesus, has always been the center-piece within Catholic piety. ...Karl Rahner, studying the phenomenon of Marian apparitions, points out that all these apparitions have one thing in common: In every case, Mary appears to a poor person. In every alleged apparition that has become accepted in popular devotion, the person Mary appears to is someone insignificant in the world's eyes. Mary has never, it seems, appeared to a Wall Street Banker, a major civic or church leader, nor even to a theologian in his or her study. She seems to pick her audience with a special purpose in mind. What purpose? To provide for them, the poor, something that the elite find elsewhere, namely, a romantic vision of the faith by which to sustain themselves emotionally. That shouldn't surprise us. Mary, after all, gave us the Magnificat. She has always had a special relationship to the poor.

More recently, as we know, Marian devotion and devotional prayer in general have fallen on hard times, intellectually and theologically. More and more, Marian devotion is written off as non-essential to the faith or worse as a harmful distraction to it. Christ, the Word, and the Eucharist, it is argued, are what's essential and the object of our intimacy is Jesus, not Mary. Moreover, what brings us together as Christians are the Word and Eucharist, not devotional prayer. Simply put, you shouldn't be substituting devotions for scripture or the Eucharist, nor saying the rosary in their place.

In essence, this critique is correct and was a needed corrective both at the time of the reformation and again at the time of the Second Vatican Council. Devotional life, and indeed all spiritual enthusiasm, too easily lose balance and, almost without exception, tend to lose their grip on the essentials. That's the danger inherent in all romance. Its very power to

inflare the heart makes it a powerful narcotic that easily becomes an end in itself. Romance easily becomes unbridled, unglued, disorienting. We know that. But we also know its power to transform lives. It can change everything in fifteen seconds.

Christ, the Word, and the Eucharist are the essentials within our faith, but, just as the main course in a meal doesn't necessarily make a complete meal, so too the essentials of our faith don't necessarily satisfy all our faith needs, particularly in terms of the heart. What the devotional life adds to the essentials is precisely the romantic, emotional fire.

And that's more necessary than we think. Eric Mascall, a Protestant theologian, commenting on the place of the devotional within the more strictly liturgical and theological, suggests that the danger in opting for essentials alone is that "we end up on a diet of antiseptics, safe from food-poisoning, but in danger of suffering from malnutrition." He's right. To give an example:

Today liturgists and theologians are almost universally opposed to having eulogies at funerals. The funeral liturgy, they contend, is complete of itself and the eulogy is an unneeded, inept distraction. They're right, in a way. The funeral liturgy is complete of itself, theologically. But that doesn't mean it's complete humanly. It's not. The normal congregation at a funeral isn't composed of people whose faith and emotional lives are so mature and integrated that the latter is fed and satisfied through the former. They want and need more than the essentials of faith and liturgy, particularly on that day. They want and need another kind of ritual, a devotional one that speaks more directly to them (however lengthy and in bad taste those eulogies sometimes are). The heart is part of the soul and too needs its due. We don't live on essentials alone.

Classically, in terms of our prayer lives, this has been handled largely by devotions and, among devotions, the ones to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, have had the privileged place, especially among the poor. In Marian devotions, the faith takes on a special relationship to the poor. In a manner of speaking, Marian devotions are the mysticism of the poor. In relating to her, countless people, without the benefit of professional training in theology or liturgy have wonderfully appropriated to themselves deep, essential truths about God's person, presence, compassion, and providence. They know and taste God's love, through their relationship to Mary.

Many years ago, when I was an 18 year-old novice, a very pious old priest gave us a talk. He shared how a young man had come to him complaining that he'd lost his faith. The old priest had simply told him: "You've lost your faith because you've lost your mother, Mary." Funny how among the hundreds of hours of talks and conferences that I heard during my novitiate year, that pious, overly-simplistic, near-saccharine, theologically-impoverished comment is about the only thing I still remember.



We are all ministers of the Mercy of God

"Dear young people, do not bury your talents, the gifts that God has given you! Do not be afraid to dream of great things."
- Pope Francis

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Celebrating Friends together

– The First Provincial Gathering in Crewe of the Friends of St. Eugene – 3rd-4th June

It was no small coincidence that the Friends of St. Eugene gathering took place on Pentecost weekend. The Oblate Retreat Centre in Crewe was filled with an amazing energy created by all who were there.

The event was a wonderful, joy-filled occasion as 36 Friends travelled from around the Province to Wistaston Hall to celebrate the Friends of St. Eugene groups having existed for 7 years. To mark this significant event they were joined by Fr. Louis Lougen, Superior General and Successor of St Eugene, Fr. Antoni Bochm the General Counsellor for Europe and our own Provincial Fr. Ray Warren.

During the day the participants had an opportunity to take part in various workshops. Many people said how they felt at ease with each other, as if they had known each other for ages even though most of them were meeting for the first time! The whole weekend could be summed up in the prayer and life experience of the Early Church: “see how they love each other”.

Before our banquet supper, Fr. Louis shared some of his personal story with us and gave us an overview of the worldwide Friends of St. Eugene groups. We then enjoyed a delicious banquet provided by the Crewe Retreat Team. It was a wonderful celebration with much laughter and enjoyment. To mark this first Gathering, we planted a Cherry Tree with a plaque inscribed with the motto of the Friends of St. Eugene: Prayer, Friendship, Service. Over the weekend, we heard the story of how the Friends began and how little seeds are now bearing good fruit!

In order to better share a flavour of this event we invited four members of the Friends of St Eugene to share the experience of this special gathering.

“An amazing and inspiring and fun-filled weekend – it was one of the best I’ve experienced for a long time. I feel very privileged to have been there. I so enjoyed chatting to Father Louis - he was so friendly and informal; a great person to lead the Oblate Family! My faith is frequently rather wobbly but this weekend experience encouraged me to be proud of my heritage. There are many things I find problematic in the church today but if only we can spread the “charism” of St. Eugene De Mazenod through encouraging Oblate associated groups such as the “Friends of St. Eugene” to be set up for all who profess to be Catholics, then the world would be a better place - particularly with Pope Francis at the helm. Thank you to the team, my love and thoughts to all who were there”.

- Paddie Lloyd, Anglesey

This gathering gave me the opportunity to meet other like-minded friends and to share, interact with them and learn about their different projects undertaken by them. This gathering has inspired, enriched, encouraged and also challenged me to rediscover my own personal charism. It has deepened my awareness of the particular nature and relationship with the teachings of the Oblate charism.

My personal highlights and fond memories included the renewal of commitment for the Friends of St Eugene, as I was deeply inspired and touched when the promises were being loudly pronounced. Also, I was moved when we were asked to pick another Friend’s name from the basket and pray for them, plus the planting of a Cherry Tree in the back garden.

- James Omunson - Birmingham



‘The gathering in June was tinged with expectation and a true sense of purpose, a diverse group that was united in prayer, reflection, and song embracing the charism of St. Eugene De Mazenod. The impact of coming together led us to New Pathways in order to live the gospel among the poor and marginalised in our society, whilst raising our awareness that our work and participation in service for our own community however small is significant. Developing and sharing in the experiences of faith and spirit of St. Eugene in the beautiful warm sunshine allowed us to appreciate the peace and tranquility of Wistaston Hall but more importantly to renew our spirits and enthusiasm for reaching out in His name.’

- Paula Henshaw – Norris Green

On Friday 2nd June was my first visit to Wistaston hall. We attended three workshops in which we discussed issues on what we can do following in the way of St Eugene. i.e. How would St Eugene deal with the issues of today? The world has not changed much since St Eugene’s time. We still have war, poverty, refugees and intolerance and we have more people on the margins of society than ever. These workshops stimulated us into thinking how we can BE MORE effective. There was a spirit moving among us, as I found some of us were able to share our life stories with each other. It is the sharing without a judgemental response that shows that Christ is truly present. I felt that this is what Eugene would want from us. Pray, not judge, for those who are troubled.

- Stephen Fletcher- Kilburn



Presentation to Fr. Louis.

Also in June members of the Province met for their annual Oblate Assembly. They were joined for this gathering by Fr. Louis Lougen. During the Assembly Fr. Ray Warren presented on behalf of the Province a gift to Fr. General and to the Congregation marking the 200th Anniversary of the Congregation – The Portrait of the Founder with a fisher-wife and her daughter in the harbour setting of Marseilles by Colum Keating. In most portraits we observe the Founder depicted in splendid isolation and in formal robes. Now we see him portrayed in ordinary circumstances as a simple pastor among the people and in the familiar setting of the harbour of Marseilles.



Lourdes 2017

This year over 600 pilgrims from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Jersey gathered under the Oblate banner in Lourdes to answer to call of Our Lady. The theme and message of Lourdes this year is taken from the gospel of St. Luke: 'the Lord has done great things for me.' Lourdes is place where we hear a message; a message that is nothing less than that of the Gospel. God comes to us to tell us that we are loved, healed and forgiven; this is the heart of the message of Lourdes. We are loved as we are with all our successes and achievements, but also with all our wounds, weaknesses and our limitations. Lourdes is the place where we experience the love God in very real and concrete ways through prayer, service, community and each other.

My pilgrimage to Lourdes as a member of the Oblate Youth Service is an experience that I will never forget. The week began with training and a nervous yet exciting wait for the arrival of our guests. Upon meeting the guests it was clear as to how special the week ahead would be for us. The next morning we were up early helping the guests to breakfast before the Stations of the Cross. Each mass in Lourdes was special, however my personal favourite was the mass at the grotto which could only be described as beautiful. My favourite moment of the trip was the torch light procession, where each guest had a candle and we all walked in a procession through the sanctuary in Lourdes. It was clear that each day in Lourdes was special for the guests, but even more special for us. A day trip to St Bartres involved a small party for us all where the guests enjoyed a meal and singing together. This was one of the best moments in Lourdes and really made me more appreciative of the little things that we should enjoy in day to day life. After some emotional goodbyes, the guests departed after a week that was an amazing experience for everyone. Not only did I learn a lot about myself through caring for the guests, but through meeting other members of the youth service I have made friends for life. The Lourdes pilgrimage was overall an amazing trip, and it will stay with me forever.

– Amber



Lourdes... a different experience every visit.

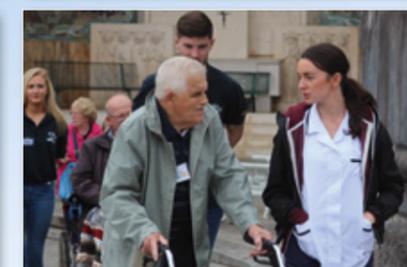
I've been going to Lourdes for quite a number of years: yet year on year, the Lourdes experience is never the same. I've come to realise that it's about where you're coming from yourself that influences the Lourdes experience. We don't come as robots: we come as a person each with our own life experiences and struggles going on. This year I was coming with a feeling of great gratitude for support given to my son: I came with a strong desire to say 'thanks'. I stood at the Grotto and I wanted to shout out my thanks, but I struggle to pray in words and I can feel lost in that struggle. Then on the second day we had a late night Mass at the Grotto, followed by Adoration. In that time of silence I felt surrounded as though I was held in a warm embrace of love and understanding. Nothing was asked of me other than to accept that I didn't need to try to say anything: just to trust.

That seemed to free me to be more present to our assisted pilgrims: to listen to their stories; to connect better with them; to connect better with my own co-workers. The heartbreak and tears that comes with that type of connecting wasn't about me. It was about and for others. And in that is the realisation – the healing of Lourdes - that my own life struggles are not all-absorbing. Lourdes is my space to feel accepted each year for where I am in life at that time.

– Mary
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On September 17th myself along with 3 others doctors, Siobhan, Chris and Sr. Eithne went to Lourdes with the Oblate pilgrimage as part of the medical team. Here, along with a large team of nurses and carers we looked after the medical needs of over 100 patients for 5 days. It was both an enriching and challenging experience but thanks to the wonderful organisation of the team the trip went very smoothly from a medical perspective. It was my second time to Lourdes with the Oblates and it was really wonderful to see so many familiar faces again this year. It was a real pleasure to be surrounded by such wonderful pilgrims but also to be amongst such kind and considerate volunteers who give freely of their time to care for the sick. Lourdes is a wonderful reminder to us all of the good in our society. There are many people without whom, organising an operation such as this would be impossible. On the medical side a special thanks to Miriam McDonald and Val Ryan for their trojan work and organisation; your dedication ensures that not only do we have an organised and safe trip, but that we all have great fun too! It's a privilege to be part of this pilgrimage family and I look forward to returning to Lourdes in 2018.

– Dr Sinéad



Presentation of the first McGonagle Medals

During this year pilgrimage Miriam McDonnell and Lily Tubman were presented with the new McGonagle medal. This medal was presented to mark 50 years of service caring for the sick in Lourdes. It is named after the late Fr. Willie McGonagle OMI who served the pilgrimage for over fifty years as chaplain to our sick and assisted pilgrims.





What not being able to travel to Lourdes taught me about the Oblate family

It was with many tears and much disappointment, that I had to accept that my annual trip to Lourdes with the Oblate Pilgrimage was not going to happen this year. I finally had to accept that I was not allowed to go by the medics, and realistically I had not the physical strength anyway. Imagine my great joy to discover that the “Oblate family,” that Fr Frank Santucci writes about every day on Facebook, is very true. I read about the importance of the “De Mazenod Family” and how it is encouraged by the Oblate congregation. But until you experience the concern, inclusion, warmth, generosity and the prayers from this “family”, that I am very grateful to be counted as belonging to, that this becomes a reality.

On the first day in Lourdes, Fr Lorcan took the scarce time to write me a lovely e-mail with times that I could connect with the ceremonies via Lourdes TV live. I never knew such a facility existed, so have tuned in to the ceremonies that take place at the Grotto several times a day since. That I have done with great excitement and unexpected pleasure. On Monday, I had a telephone call from my inspiring friend Mossie, who prayed with me on the phone and has done so many other extraordinary gestures for me since. I feel so included.

For the candlelight procession, my wonderful friend Angie, videoed the whole procession on her phone, that I could join with her on Skype. Words could never explain or express the deepening peace and immense gratitude that came over me. One particularly kind one from Martina McPhillips, who held a candle for me for the entirety of the candlelight procession, was overwhelming for me. I love that procession with all its mystery of thousands and thousands of people, holding lighted candles and praying the Rosary and singing hymns around Rosary Square. A spectacular show of faith and hope.



All the Oblates and helpers are dedicated to the care and service of the pilgrims, without preference or discrimination. This is what the “Oblate family” means at every level, just love of their fellow pilgrims who come every year for renewal and sustenance for their souls.

I missed you all so painfully, but it was made tolerable with all the connections, prayers and inclusion, for which I am very grateful to Our Lady of Lourdes who I am sure arranged it to pacify my disappointment. Even though not present physically, my spirit woke to the message of Lourdes every morning, knowing I was indeed part of the group and included in all aspects of the week. I wish I could be there, but the Lord deigned differently this year, maybe to teach me a lesson of how absolutely important it is to be part of and be lucky to be, one of the Oblate family, just like my dearly loved brother, Fr. Jack was. A heartfelt thank you all, from Peg.



Oblate Summer Camp

“to God who giveth joy to my youth. To thee, O God my God, I will give praise” – Psalm 43:4

This summer young people from across our Province gathered for the annual Oblate Summer Camp at Lilliput Adventure Centre near Mullingar. Located on the shores of Lough Ennell and surrounded by forest, hills and bog, it was a perfect location for a week’s fun and fellowship. As well as our usual team of Oblate Youth Workers and Volunteers, we were also pleased to welcome Fr Eduardo Núñez Yépez OMI, as our Camp Chaplain.

On the first day we got to experience “bog-hopping” a racecourse made out of a series of local bogs. After some initial nerves, the group got stuck in (literally) having a great time slipping and sliding in the mud! After that, it was straight into the Lough to do some kayaking.

Other days we spent time in the forest doing lots of games, orienteering, capture the flag and laser-tag. In each case these games and activities gave the young people a chance to work together, teaching them the value of trust and teamwork.

Thursday morning the group took on to the Croghan Hill Challenge, a boot camp style assault course. Each obstacle required teamwork and mutual support to be successful. To see the group pull together to support one another was a joy to see!

In the evenings, it was time for our workshops. These used group games and talks to teach the young people about values of self-respect and inclusivity. There was also recognition for individual campers that personified this spirit each day. On one day it was one of the girls facing their fear of heights and trying hard to conquer the centres climbing wall. On another, it was a boy who worked hard to help others and make sure everyone was included.



On the final night the group organised a concluding Mass. Small groups of young people organised a different aspect of the Mass, bringing their own experiences and symbols of the week together into a beautiful and personal celebration. It was an opportunity then to give thanks to God for the week and reflect on the gifts each had received over the last week.

This made parting the next morning a little bittersweet with each group going their separate ways. Not before a couple of photos and promises of staying in touch of course! In all it was a great week of adventure and friendship, not to be forgotten. Here’s to next year already!



Summer School

This year's Summer School was presented in a new and very creative way. On offer was not just one speaker presenting one subject, instead the Charism Team from Partners in Mission invited others to join them to present some of the contemporary issues facing the Church and the World today.

Sr. Catherine Lavery HFB, Mossie Lyons and Pam Smith accepted the invitation to be part of the Presenting Team and their expertise certainly contributed to the success of the venture.

Over thirty people, from all parts of the UK, joined us in Wistaston Hall, Crewe for the weekend. It was a great joy for the Team to meet again many old friends and regular attendees to the Summer School as well as this year welcoming new friends too.

On offer were workshops covering topics as diverse as Human Trafficking, the Wonders of the Earth and ways of Discipleship to the awe inspiring Creation walks and the fun - filled drama session, offered as an alternative on Saturday afternoon.

In her workshop, Sr. Catherine presented the Wonders of the Earth. Offering participants a chance to reflect, in depth, on the beauty of God's creation through image, music, scripture and spiritual writings. Sr. Catherine produced an inspiring PowerPoint of beautiful images to illustrate her reflections. It was indeed an opportunity to explore our relationship with the Earth, and Space, in a very beautiful way.

Kirk and Dawn in their workshops, helped people to appreciate the awesomeness of God's creation in a more practical way. Kirk accompanied small groups walking in the local surroundings of Wistaston Park where they experienced God's love for them in the gifts of the environment. They listened to each other's stories as they walked and experienced the awe and wonder of God's creation. They stopped and gazed at the beauty around them and 'tuned into' the sounds of nature. They took photos of the beauty of the environment some of which were shown later to the whole group as a PowerPoint presentation. The creation walk was certainly a rare opportunity 'to stand and stare'.

Dawn, on the other hand, had prepared a Creation Sense experience for those unable to walk to Wistaston Park. Every sense was overwhelmed. On the white crockery, there was an explosion of colour, smells, tastes and things to touch. It was a very beautiful sense experience achieved in a very prayerful and contemplative way.

Discipleship was the thread that connected three of the workshops. Mossie Lyons explored the Spirituality of Brokenness, Bro Michael looked at Being a Pilgrim and Veronica's presentation considered the invitation from Pope Francis "Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: So what are we waiting for? (*Joy of the Gospel Para. 120*).

All three workshops offered different challenges to the participants. Mossie posed the question; I'm no saint... are you? In this workshop, using familiar Scripture passages, Mossie shared how all of us, though imperfect people, can have a relationship with God by discovering the God who walks with us today and who will continue to journey with all of us into tomorrow.

Introducing the 'Being a Pilgrim' workshop with the quote 'you are on a sacred journey whether you like it or not and the journey is your own daily life.' helped people in this workshop to realise that every day of life is a sacred pilgrimage.

Bro Michael offered people using silence, poetry, music and art, the time to reflect on their own journey and on what has shaped their image of God and their own spirituality. It was a time to reflect on the journey of their lives, and appreciate the uniqueness and sacredness of each one's life as a deep and meaningful pilgrimage.



Veronica spoke about having a missionary outlook on life. And not being a missionary in the old sense of leaving everything to go to the far corners of the earth. Instead, she explored how and where, in the 21st century, we can become effective missionary disciples. Using the mantra, "Disturb us Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves."

She spoke briefly about her own experience in Zimbabwe with the Oblates as having a profound effect on her life and how it altered her understanding of 'having a mission'. We are called to have a mission for love. A mission we are called to fulfil everyday in, through and with those with whom we live and work.

Pam, a student working for an MA in International Slavery Studies, spoke about the harrowing reality of slavery in today's world. She made us aware of the Human Trafficking policy in place in the UK as well as investigating initiatives and campaigns with which people could get involved. Using case studies the participants were asked to decide whether it was a case of Human trafficking, Slavery, exploitation or entrapment. This led to some lively debates and disagreements. It was an eye opening presentation and brought into focus very clearly the savagery of the situation. Pam shared occasions of how we, probably but unwittingly, add to the perpetuation of such practices through our use of mobile phones or even eating chocolate!

The Pilgrim Troupe session was offered an alternative to going to the shops or having '40 Winks' on Saturday afternoon. It was an attempt to look at / understand Scripture through drama. All I can add to that statement is that there was plenty of drama, fun and laughter as people took part in the warm up and vocal exercises. Several versions of the Sunday's Gospel were dramatised by the different groups in their own way but what happened in the Old Conference room stays in the Old Conference room.

STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING



The vision of the Summer School was to offer participants a brief experience of contemporary issues that affect the Church and world today. It was the Team's hope that the topics would challenge participants and that, after the weekend, they would be inspired to delve deeper into one or more of the areas covered in the workshops. Judging by the depth and detail of the evaluations from the group, it is fair to say this was achieved.

Thanks to all who shared the weekend with us for your active participation and your laughter and we look forward to Summer School 2018!

Ditching FairTrade: not my cup of tea.



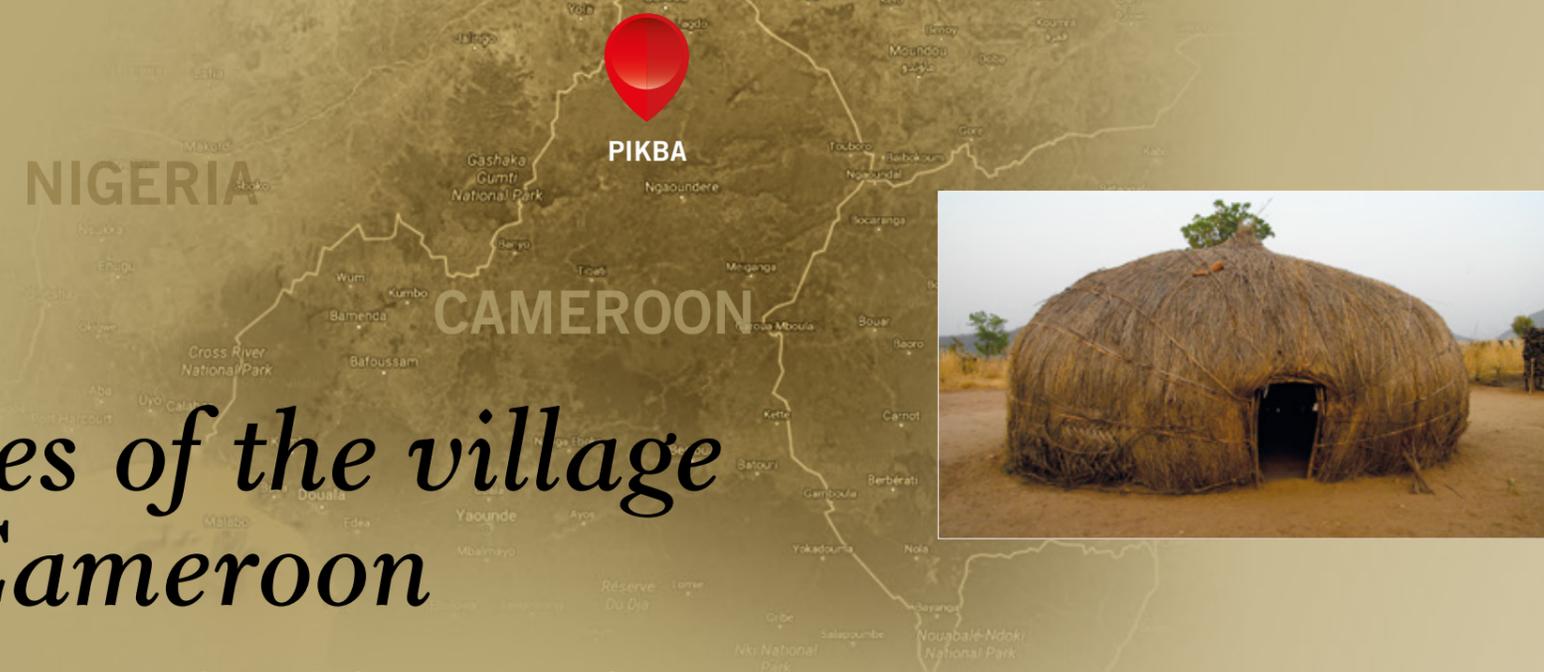
Many Oblate Parishes in Britain have local Justice and Peace groups and many parishes work to promote Fairtrade products. The Fairtrade Mark is the most widely recognised and trusted independent ethical label in the world and has proved it can make a difference to the lives of millions of farmers and workers in developing countries. Following the Sainsbury supermarket's decision to drop Fairtrade certification for its own brand teas and replace it with their own Fairly Traded accreditation a group of charities including CAFOD, have launched their own campaign to stop Sainsbury's ditching Fairtrade. A day of action has been organised for 28th of October. They're asking supporters to campaign locally and have lots of ideas and resources available from: dontditchfairtrade.com

Tea can be powerful. Every Fairtrade cuppa makes a difference to the lives of tea farmers and workers in some of the world's poorest communities.

Sainsbury's are weakening this power by ditching the Fairtrade Mark from some of their own-brand tea and replacing it with a 'Fairly Traded' label. They've decided to abandon Fairtrade and pilot their own scheme.

Tea farmers will no long be able to decide for themselves how to spend the money that they have earned through the Fairtrade Premium.

It's also very likely to mislead customers who may think 'Fairly Traded' is the same as independent Fairtrade certification. It's not.



For the land to be cultivated, I met the Lamido of the district of Gouna, the district to which Pikba is attached, to discuss with him the situation of arable land. He promised to send his collaborators to the site to increase the land area they have available. As they say: "Land to be cultivated is their chief resource; if they do not plant, neither will they eat."

The living conditions of these refugees would improve even more if the problems mentioned above could find a decisive and lasting solution.

War refugees of the village of Pikba, Cameroon

Brother Ernest MBEMBA, the chairman of the JPIC committee of the Province of Cameroon, describes for us his ministry with poor war refugees.

Pikba is a village of war refugees, situated some 34 km from Poli. The village is part of our parish territory. Because of the lack of roads, access to this village is possible only by motorcycle, a situation even more complicated during the rainy season.



In early 2014, the war refugees (Cameroonians) from the Nigerian border in far North Cameroon were forced to leave their villages because of the terrorist incursions of the Islamist sect Boko Haram. Almost all their homes were burned and their property looted. Many have lost family members. They came to live in this village where the Lamido (Muslim chief), the town chieftain, gave them a small piece of land.

be faced with a lack of personnel. I contacted two teachers, young parishioners who had finished at the teacher training school and have agreed to work with the director, the only teacher that headquarters had sent. But their taking over poses problems. With my support, three wooden and straw shelters that will serve classrooms have already been built.

It is this community of displaced people that I visit once a month, to share their difficulties, to ensure a comforting presence and together to find solutions to improve their living conditions as war refugees. It is a community that lacks everything: school, a health center, arable land, drinking water. In addition, many of its members do not have official documents (birth certificates and a national identity card). I have already made several approaches to the traditional, the administrative and the municipal authorities of Lagdo (80 km from Pikba), the district on which Pikba depends for all these problems; for some of them, we are beginning to find solutions.

For water, the refugees get their supply in ponds where they compete with the domestic animals. Consequently, there are many water-borne diseases. The refugees want to have wells that do not require maintenance other than drilling.

And now about the school. After some inquiries in Lagdo, I was able to obtain official recognition of a school that had been established in our area. It has been operating since the beginning of the school year, 4 September 2017. Thus, the 300 or so children of school age (a constantly increasing number) can finally go to school. However, we will

The vast majority of adults and almost all the young people and children do not have a birth certificates or a national identity card (lost or burned during the attacks on their villages). I have begun negotiations with the authorities of Lagdo to have these valuable documents prepared, but these procedures take long and require several journeys between the two cities (Poli and Lagdo). We hope that they will make good, because almost 450 refugees are in this situation.

Oblate Retreat Centre

Advent 2017

DAY RETREATS

Dates: Tuesday 5th December
Wednesday 6th December
Saturday 9th December

The coming of God into our world, the Feast of Christmas, expresses, at its deepest level, the incredible love of God for us... and yet, amid the hype and energy of Christmas, we so easily lose sight of the miracle which is Christmas. This Day Retreat is ideally suited for groups or individuals who wish to stop for a few moments, to step outside their busy schedules, to rest, be at peace and reflect in a gentle and prayerful way on the Glory of Christmas.

The Retreat will include a reflective input, Eucharist, quiet times for reflection and an opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Each day begins with Registration and Coffee at 10.00am and finishes at 4.00pm.

Cost: With soup & rolls, scones, jam & cream at lunch time £17.50 per person.
With tea & coffee (bringing packed lunch) £12 per person.

For information on these and our other events please contact the Oblate Team at:
Oblate Retreat Centre, Wistaston Hall, 89 Broughton Lane, Crewe, Cheshire, CW2 8JS
Tel: +44 (0) 1270 568 653 or **E-mail:** director@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk
www.orc-crewe.org



2 DAY RETREATS

Dates: Mon 11th (supper) – Wed 13th (lunch) Dec
Fri 15th (supper) – Sun 17th (lunch) Dec

An opportunity to prepare for the great Feast of Christmas, to bring our focus to what is at the heart of Christmas, the birth of a child in Bethlehem and the amazing wonder of a God who loves us so much more than we can ever understand.

This Retreat will include some reflective inputs, Eucharist, moments of prayer and periods for quiet and gentle reflection. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can also be celebrated with anyone who wishes to truly "come home" to God this Christmas.

Cost: Residential £124,
Non- Residential £80 Deposit £10

An Advent Retreat for
Oblate Parishioners
and Friends

'Shout With a Loud Voice, Joyful Messenger'

(Isaiah 40:9)

Presented by
Fr. Brian Maher OMI
and
Sr. Catherine Lavery HFB

Oblate Retreat Centre, Wistaston Hall, Crewe
6pm, Fri 8th - 2pm, Sun 10th December

To book a place on the retreat / for more information

Contact:

Mr. Kirk Jacob, Oblate Partners in Mission Office
Denis Hurley House, 14 Quex Road, London NW6 4PL

£99

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7624 7296 Email: kirk.oblate.partners@googlemail.com



Subscribe to the Oblate Pools and Support the Oblate Missions

Weekly prizes of €300 and €150

For the past 40 years the Oblate Pools has been raising funds for the Oblate Missions overseas. The subscription for the year is €30/£25. Each subscriber receives a unique code and every Saturday the draw for the winners takes place. The winners are picked based on the results of Football matches in winter and of race meetings throughout the summer. To purchase an annual subscription please email Barbara Hogan at: mamioblate@eircom.net or write to The Mission Office, House of Retreat, Tyrconnell Road, Inchicore, Dublin 8, Ireland.

You can also subscribe online: www.oblates.ie

All proceeds from the Oblate Pools is used to support the work of the Oblate Mission throughout the world.



If you would like to share your thoughts or ideas with us please contact: Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly OMI, Partners in Mission Office, Denis Hurley House, 14 Quex Road, London NW6 4PL or email oblate_partners@btinternet.com

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