

*Missionary Oblates
– Always Close to the People*

Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.46, 17th February, 2020

I would like to begin this introduction with two simple words, Thank You. These two words to express gratitude are so important in life and yet I know there are times when I have not said them often enough! At a personal level I am grateful for all the support and generosity of the many people who have shared my life story and supported me in both joyful and difficult times. At a broader level I have been struck many times by the enormous generosity of people as they strive to live their faith. Like in so many previous issues of Connections, this issue contains many of examples of such generosity.

Fr Ron Rolheiser writes that “To receive in gratitude, to be properly grateful, is the most primary of all religious attitudes. Proper gratitude is ultimate virtue. It defines sanctity. Saints, holy persons, are people who are grateful, people who see and receive everything as gift.”

Faith is God’s free gift to us and we are invited to simply open ourselves to receive it. Of course this is something easier said than done. In striving to understand how to live with such openness I am grateful to have discovered the writings of Ruth Burrows. In her book ‘Prayer is God’s work’ she writes, “Faith is a profound mystery that we can never adequately explain.

...Faith is never a mere intellectual assent but always involves commitment. It is always in action, more a verb than a noun. Faith cannot be one facet or a particular aspect of my life, but my whole life. As St. Paul says, ‘My real life is the faith I have in the Son of God who loved me and delivered himself for me.’ Many people think they have no faith because they feel they haven’t. They do not realize that they must make a choice to believe, take the risk of believing, of committing themselves and setting themselves to live out the commitment. Never mind that they continue to feel that they do not believe. Under cover of being ‘authentic’ we can spend our lives waiting for the kind of certainty we cannot have”

As we seek to grow in faith maybe there is an invitation for us to commit ourselves to developing grateful hearts. At the end of this day it would be good to stop and ask ourselves who and what are we grateful for in our lives. For if we follow the example of Jesus at the Last Supper it is only after we first stop to give thanks can “break and share” with others.

– Fr. Lorcán O’Reilly OMI

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Lessons Through

– *Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI*

What's to be learned through failure, through being humbled by our own faults? Generally that's the only way we grow. In being humbled by our own inadequacies we learn those lessons in life that we are deaf to when we are strutting in confidence and pride. There are secrets, says John Updike, which are hidden from health. This lesson is everywhere in scripture and permeates every spirituality in every religion worthy of the name.

Raymond E. Brown, offers an illustration of this from scripture: Reflecting on how at one point in its history, God's chosen people, Israel, betrayed its faith and was consequently humiliated and thrown into a crisis about God's love and concern for them, Brown points out that, long range, this seeming disaster ended up being a positive experience: "Israel learned more about God in the ashes of the Temple destroyed by the Babylonians than in the elegant period of the Temple under Solomon."

What does he mean by that? Just prior to being conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, Israel had just experienced what, to all outside appearances, looked like the high point of her history (politically, socially, and religiously). She was in possession of the promised land, had subdued all her enemies, had a great king ruling over her, and had a magnificent temple in Jerusalem as a place to worship and a center to hold all the people together. However, inside that apparent strength, perhaps because of it, she had become complacent about her faith and increasing lax in being faithful to it. That complacency and laxity led to her downfall. In 587 BCE, she was overrun by a foreign nation who, after taking the land, deported most of the people to Babylon, killed the king, and knocked the temple down to its last stone. Israel spent the next nearly half-century in exile, without a temple, struggling to reconcile this with her belief that God loved her.

However, in terms of the bigger picture, this turned out to be a positive. The pain of being exiled and the doubts of faith that were triggered by the destruction of her temple were ultimately offset by what she learned through this humiliation and crisis, namely, that God is faithful even when we aren't, that our failures open our eyes to us our own complacency and blindness, and that what looks like success is often its opposite, just as what looks like failure is often its opposite. As Richard Rohr might phrase it, in our failures we have a chance to "fall upward".

There's no better image available, I believe, by which to understand what the church is now undergoing through the humiliation thrust on it through the clerical sexual abuse crisis within Roman Catholicism and within other churches as well. To recast Raymond Brown's insight: The church can learn more about God in the ashes of the clerical sexual abuse crisis than it did during its elegant periods of grand cathedrals, burgeoning church growth, and unquestioned acquiescence to ecclesial authority. It can also learn more about itself, its blindness to its own faults, and its need for some structural change and personal conversion. Hopefully, like the Babylonian exile for Israel, this too will be for the churches something that's positive in the end.

Moreover, what's true institutionally for the church (and, not doubt, for other organizations) is also true for each of us in our personal lives. The humiliations that beset us because of our inadequacies, complacencies, failures, betrayals, and blindness to our own faults can be occasions to "fall upward", to learn in the ashes what we didn't learn in the winner's circle.



Failure

Almost without exception, our major successes in life, our grander achievements, and the boost in status and adulation that come with that generally don't deepen us in any way. To paraphrase James Hillman, success usually doesn't bring a shred of depth into our lives. Conversely, if we reflect with courage and honesty on all the things that have brought depth and character into our lives we will have to admit that, in virtually every case, it would be something that has an element of shame to it – a feeling of inadequacy about our own body, some humiliating element in our upbringing, some shameful moral failure in our life, or something in our character about which we feel some shame. These are the things that have given us depth.

Humiliation makes for depth; it drives us into the deeper parts of our soul. Unfortunately, however, that doesn't always make for a positive result. The pain of humiliation makes us deep; but it can make us deep in two ways: in understanding and empathy but also in a bitterness of soul that would have us get even with the world.

But the positive point is this: Like Israel on the shores of Babylon, when our temple is damaged or destroyed, in the ashes of that exile we will have a chance to see some deeper things to which we are normally blind.

“in the ashes of that exile we will have a chance to see some deeper things to which we are normally blind.”



on average 15,000 people die
in mining accidents every
year around the globe

The Personal Costs of Mining

Formed by a meteorite impact nearly 2 billion years ago, the Sudbury basin located in Northern Ontario, Canada, produces nearly 30% of the world's nickel. This is the key ingredient to make stainless steel. From cellphones to utensils to weapons all use minerals found below the surface of my home region of Sudbury, Ontario.

I come from a family that has been involved in mining for two generations. Many family members and childhood friends work for mining companies, unions or industries related to extractives. My grandfathers, both maternal and paternal, came from farming families who had been cultivating the lands of Northern Ontario for generations. Though they lived hard lives, their work fed their families and their communities. By the middle of the 20th century, their livelihoods were impacted by the arrival of cheaper produce and foods from elsewhere, thus forcing them to seek work below the land their ancestors had toiled and cultivated for generations. I remember my dad spoke of going down below the surface of the earth as a life changing experience; he often compared mining to combat because he and his comrades battled the harsh and dangerous work environment – all so they could feed their families. Over the years, many of my dad's co-workers have died in mining accidents. Underground workers sacrifice their health working for 12 hours at a time while the mining companies who employ them and profit the most from their labor do little to appreciate or protect them – unless they are legislated to do so.

Fast forward to May of 2014, I'm a member of a communications team working for a major political party during that year's provincial election in Ontario.



Marc Methé Family



Marc Methé

We had been informed of a major 'cave-in' at Lockerby mine near my hometown of Sudbury, Ontario. As we were planning our response to the mining accident, little did I know this would hit so close to home. Marc Methé, my cousin, went to work underground that day full of aspirations for the future, never to come back out alive. He died in that 'cave-in' along with another co-worker, Norm Bisailon, a father of two. Marc was kind and smart, destined for great things in his life. He would help anybody if he could! His job as contractor for Taurus Drilling was a stepping stone for him. He worked hard and had big plans. Most of all, he wanted to make his family proud – and we were! His untimely death resulted in a grieving family that, to this day, still await answers and accountability from the companies responsible for his death.

According to website, TheWorldCounts.org a non-profit data-driven statistics website, on average 15,000 people die in mining accidents every year around the globe with over 7,500 deaths this year alone. These numbers

are very conservative estimates based on reported numbers of deaths. The real numbers can only be higher because reporting is not mandatory in all countries,

nor are all mining operations legal in many places. Marc's death highlights the plight of workers worldwide who fight for justice in similarly dangerous conditions. When companies are not being held accountable, this endangers the lives of all those whom they employ.

So, what can we do? How does our faith call us to justice in the face of these kinds of injustices? Firstly, it is important for people of faith to minister to working families, especially when we find ourselves in regions impacted by extractive industries such as mining. By familiarizing ourselves with the lived experience of workers, we can begin to appreciate the daily sacrifices workers make going underground. Secondly, we can help by supporting workers and their families during labor disputes. And finally, we can get involved in local community groups working and fighting for ecological justice. By being present in these kinds of milieus, we can get a feel for issues that concern local communities affected by the extractive industry. Being in solidarity with the most vulnerable is not only part of the Oblate charism, but also our way of following the call of Jesus, who himself came from a working family of 'tektons' (laborers).

– Br. Joey Methé, OMI

- This article originally appeared on www.omiusajpic.org



Br. Joey Methé, OMI, is a creative professional who has always been passionate about social solidarity and ecological justice. He began his activist work advocating for the linguistic rights of francophone students and fighting for unhindered access to post-secondary education. He then went on to work for the Student Federation of the University of Ottawa for over 9 years as the Communications Director. After years of leadership in the student movement in Canada, he became a religious brother with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate on August 1st, 2018. This was his way to answer Jesus' call to be in solidarity with those who are forgotten, abandoned and oppressed.

“Don't be Robbed of your Joy” – Pope Francis

Presented by David Wells

10.30 am July 25 – 4 pm July 27th , Wistaston Hall, Crewe, England.

These days it is tempting to fall into the traps of cynicism, boredom and despair. These traps impair our ability to live happily. The tensions in our lives cause frustration and anger to sit just below the surface of things. It can be hard to hear the still small voice of God behind the noisy anxiety in our heads.

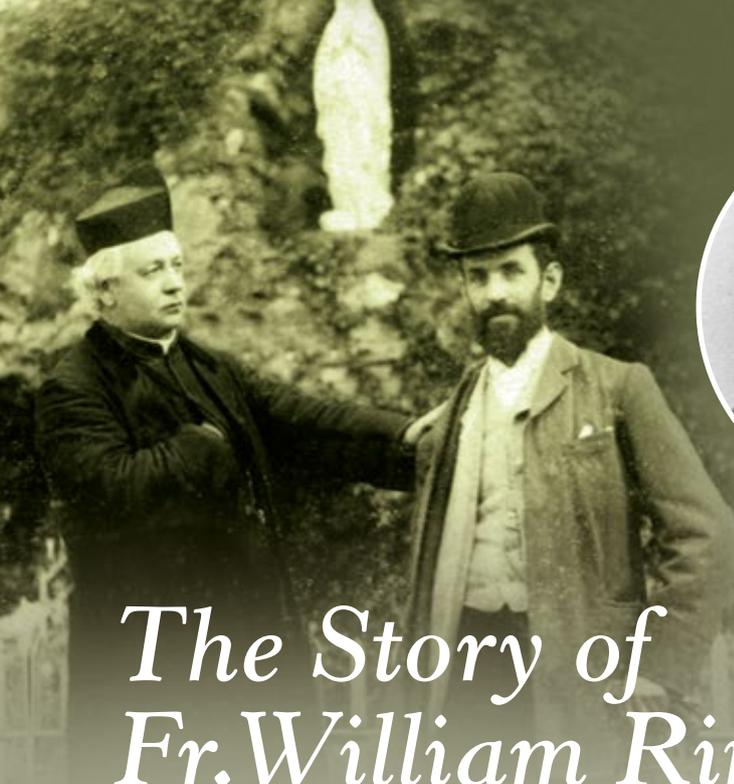
During these days together we will take a step back from the frantic pace of things. We will consider the role Christian virtues play in our lives. Is it possible to be robbed of our joy, our love, our hope and ultimately our very humanity? We will pay particular attention to the virtues Pope Francis appeals for. The virtues of joy, mercy, tenderness and courage. For Pope Francis the revival of these virtues is essential not only to our happiness, but to the very credibility of the Church.

The cost for this event is £195 and this includes accommodation and all meals. There are also a limited number of non-residential places available.



David Wells is a catechist and author who has spoken at more than 300 conferences worldwide. David has contributed to the production of catechetical resources in the UK and North America and he scripted and produced the video series “You, your Children and their Catholic faith” which sold widely throughout the English speaking Church. He has published two books, *The Reluctant Disciple* and *The Grateful Disciple*.

For more information and or to book a place please contact Kirk Jacob at k.jacob@oblates.co.uk or phone +44 (0) 20 76247296.



...the Hospitalité Notre Dame de Lourdes
...invalids from Australia joined
...friendship, their dedicated service
...devotion to Our Lady. We
...salute the second

The Story of Fr. William Ring, OMI 1834-1919

– From the Archives

Many recognized in Father William a great entrepreneur, a builder and fund-raiser, and a ‘safe pair of hands’ who could be trusted with delicate commissions.. But he was much more, touching many lives spiritually and making a lasting contribution to the spiritual life of our Oblate mission.

After his ordination by St Eugene (the Founder of the Oblates) in 1859 in Marseilles, Father William was assigned to the still-fledgling Anglo-Irish Province mission. His first appointment was to the new St. Kevin’s Reformatory in Glenree, Ireland, as one of the team of Oblates charged with setting it up. Then he was assigned for a brief period to the House of Retreat, Inchicore. There followed a short but pastorally fruitful role in the recently opened Leith mission, interrupted when he was summoned to the new Tower Hill mission as superior in 1865.

Tower Hill, like other East End slums, was particularly vulnerable because it was the landing stage for immigrants and there were little or no medical checks; epidemics were frequent and serious. The outbreak of cholera in 1866, and what Fr Ring did to cope with its ravages and the threat of starvation during the very harsh winter of 1867 are part of local folklore. He took the lead in forming a Relief Committee, which was able to draw down funding from the Lord Mayor’s Mansion House Fund. Here his contribution would be his efficient organization of essential relief work for the poverty-stricken people of the East End during a cholera epidemic and the school buildings described by Cardinal Manning as ‘magnificent’.



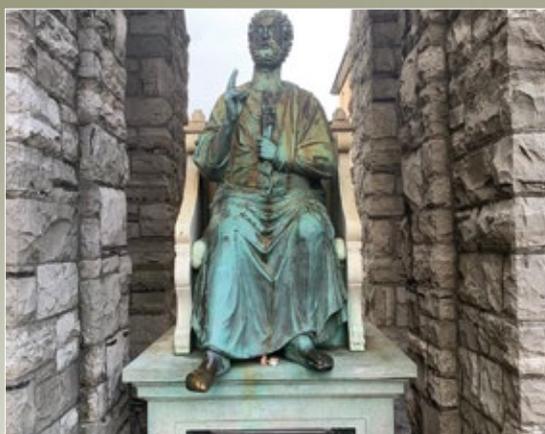
Our Lady of Graces Shrine, Tower Hill

His work in Tower Hill was ended when, returning to London in 1870 after the provincial retreat in Inchicore, he narrowly escaped death in a railway accident that cost the life of his confrere Father Edward Healy. After a long convalescence he returned to work only in 1874, now back in Inchicore. This was his usual address from 1874 to 1903 where as well as being a mission preacher he would also be bursar and superior.

It was while he was provincial (1883-1887) that he built the chapel in Belmont in south County Dublin dedicated to “Our Lady of Lourdes”, believed to be the first chapel to receive that dedication in Ireland. It is admired as a fine example of the neo-gothic, often described as ‘a little jewel’. This period also marks his special legacy to Inchicore: the beautiful chancel of the Church of Mary Immaculate, opened in 1899 and fund-raising to clear the church of debt so that though still incomplete it was consecrated on December 3, 1903.



Mary Immaculate Church, Inchicore



Statue to mark the first pilgrimage to Rome

But the work for which Father Ring will be principally remembered began with a private pilgrimage to the Lourdes Grotto in September 1879 to perform a service for the Bishop of Toronto. This visit inspired him in 1882 to conduct the first pilgrimage from Britain and Ireland to Lourdes. This was a landmark moment in the story of British and Irish popular piety. A second pilgrimage followed in 1886 and earned the praise of the Pope. He enrolled countless ‘Associates’ to pray for and share in the privileges of the pilgrimage. So were laid the foundations for the great tradition of the annual Oblate pilgrimage to Lourdes which continues to this day. Pilgrimages are events “...where the People of God can be recognized in their journey. There the believer celebrates the joy of feeling surrounded by myriad brothers and sisters, journeying together toward God who awaits them. Christ himself becomes pilgrim, and walks arisen among the poor. The decision to set out toward the shrine is already a confession of faith, walking is a true song of hope, and arrival is the encounter of love...” We owe it to Father Ring that this marvellous experience is at the heart of our Province’s life.

His special gift was recognized by the Irish Bishops who entrusted Fr William with the organization of the national pilgrimage to Rome – it was 1893, the year of the Pontifical Jubilee of Leo XIII. For this work he again received the commendation of the Pope. He organized another pilgrimage to Rome in 1900, the Jubilee Year and in 1902 in honour of the Pontifical Jubilee, again at the request of the Bishops. He planned an Irish pilgrimage to the Holy Land but this was blocked by the outbreak of the First World War. At this tragic time, through the Association of Mary Immaculate, he organised a crusade of prayer for peace.

In all these ways Fr William showed himself to be an outstanding ‘spiritual entrepreneur’ of popular religious piety. At that time it was not unusual for the intelligentsia to turn up its nose at this type of activity. Today popular piety is acknowledged to be a “precious treasure of the Catholic Church” (Pope

Benedict XVI) and “a true expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the people of God” (Pope Francis).

So Fr William’s exceptional charism continues to bear fruit in our own day. William was a native of Ulster. He had become a Catholic at the age of 16 and had set off from his home in Belfast to enter the Oblate novitiate in Sicklinghall in Yorkshire (21 September 1854). He was there for three years, and moved on to complete his formation in Marseilles under the eye of St. Eugene the Oblate Founder. He wrote in 1902: “I lived with the Founder for two years in Marseilles, was admitted to friendly intercourse with him, and received from him special favours...Among my privileges was the commission to visit the English-speaking prisoners in the city gaol, to comfort them in his name and on his behalf. Another commission authorized me to prepare the Oblate students for their apostolic work in the English-speaking countries...”

At the end of his life Fr Ring retired to the juniorate in Belcamp Hall. On 11th February 1917 he went with the Belcamp juniors to join the Belmont novitiate community and many Oblate Fathers in the celebration of the diamond Jubilee of Our Lady’s Apparition at Lourdes in the chapel he had dedicated to her.

He went in September 1918 to preach a novena in honour of Our Lady of Grace in Tower Hill, took ill with the influenza that was then rife, retired to Kilburn and died there on 29 April 1919. He is buried in Inchicore, and the street adjoining the Oblate property is named after him.

– Michael Hughes OMI





Out Reach in London

One of my favourite hymns is “Christ has no body now but yours”. It is based on the prayer written by an enclosed Carmelite sister, Teresa of Avila 500 years ago. It speaks of the reality that we, the baptised, are the hands, the feet, the eyes and the heart of Jesus in our world now. Here in Kilburn we have developed a very strong outreach programme to those on the periphery of our church and or our society. We have several programmes that enable us to be the Body of Christ NOW to our Brothers and Sisters. These are just some of the ways that we in Kilburn are reaching out and are easily adaptable to all our parishes in the Province.



The Porch Project

Every Thursday a team of volunteers arrive to help set up the Mazenod Hall so that we can welcome a group of elderly, lonely or homeless individuals from our community. We provide them with tea, coffee, cake before a three-course meal is presented. The volunteers come from all walks of life within Kilburn, young and old and our aim is to offer friendship and a nutritious meal to our guests. On average we have between 28-30 guests. Involvement in the Porch Project is also required as part of the preparation for the Confirmation Programme.

Prison Volunteers

I have recently been appointed the Catholic Chaplain at Pentonville Prison and 20 parishioner’s volunteer on a rota basis to visit the prison on a Thursday afternoon for Bible Study or Saturday morning for Eucharist. The volunteers provide a friendly face and a welcome to the prisoners. We meet and greet them at the chapel door and hand out leaflets for the mass and encourage them to participate in the hymns and the prayers. Each week over 60 prisoners join us for the Mass and after a while the visitors begin to recognise the lads and know their names.



The Foodbank

On one of the pillars of the church we have a large heart shape on which we have smaller hearts which have the name of non-perishable food stuff which people are encouraged the next time they come to church to bring in what is written on one of the smaller hearts. The gifts are placed in a basket at the altar and then they are brought in by a team of volunteers and put into bags for those who call the door at Quex Road looking for food. The Confirmation Candidates take their place on a rota basis in bagging the food after Mass on Sunday mornings. On any day over 20 bags of food are distributed. The generosity of parishioners is amazing. Over the Christmas 200 hampers were distributed.



Free Legal Aid

Every month 2 of our parishioners volunteer their time and expertise as Legal Experts in offering free legal advice to people. We have a waiting list of parishioners who require assistance in this area.

Each of the projects that we have started here in Kilburn are easily achievable. It has been my experience that there are many people who are longing to take up the challenge and put their faith into practice in their daily lives. The response from parishioners has been amazing. The projects have injected new life into the community. People are able to hear the parable from Matthew 25 in a new way. In that passage Jesus says, what you did to the least of my sisters and brothers you did to me. Are you willing to take the next best step and be Christ like in word and in action?



– Fr Terry Murray, OMI



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

We are all ministers of the Mercy of God

For more information on becoming an Oblate Priest or Brother please contact:

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l.philomin@oblates.ie

Fr. John Mc Fadden, OMI, Sacred Heart Church,
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www.oblatevocations.com



Christians and Muslims give thanks for missionary presence in the Sahara

In July 1954, during the Holy Marian Year commemorating the centenary of the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Pius XII created the Apostolic Prefecture of the Sahara and entrusted it to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. With this act, the first seeds were sown for the Church to take root in this territory where the local population was and is entirely Muslim. Father Leo Deschâtelets, OMI, then Superior General, had written to the group of missionaries: “We will not be true missionaries if we do not deal with Muslims.” The first Oblate missionaries, headed by Felix ERVITI, the newly appointed Apostolic Prefect, arrived in August 1954. He would be followed by no less than 35 Oblates who left their mark. Sixty-five years later, Muslims and Christians remembered gratefully their beneficial presence on this earth.

The celebrations of this Jubilee took place on two different dates and in two places separated by more than 500 kilometers: Sunday, November 17, 2019, in Dakhla and the following Sunday, in El Aaiún. In the morning, the small Christian community thanked God, solemnizing the Eucharist with African rhythms in the first of the celebrations, and then, in the second, we widened the horizon to the entire world in recognition of representatives from all continents. Our Christian communities are made up of itinerant workers or migrants who are present only on a temporary basis. The Oblates, the only permanent presence, make their way with these people, learning together how to be witnesses of Jesus and his Gospel in an Islamic context. We are a small Church, a ferment of fraternity and sowers of hope who, together with our Muslim brothers, walk in this desert that surrounds and inspires us; and we fight for a more fraternal,



just world. A small church, like a mustard seed, we are talking about thirty-five of us who celebrate in Dakhla and fifteen in El Aaiún...

The second part of the celebration was a meeting with the local population to thank one another and to thank God together. And here, all our expectations were exceeded, not only by the very large influx of those who came, but by the environment that was created. The memory of the missionaries who passed through is very much alive among the Muslims who appreciate that simple presence of the Church in their land. Emotions increased as we remembered them, looking at photographs, and as stories and anecdotes arose in the small gatherings. Some tears were shed as we remembered happy and painful moments that were lived together and especially when listening to the video recorded message of Fr. Camilo González, who spent more than 45 years on the mission.



Mario León, Apostolic Prefect of the Sahara, stressed that for us, Oblate missionaries, it is a gift from God to be here and that this meeting of so many Muslim friends with the small Christian community was also a commitment to continue walking together. Signs of recognition were evident on faces, while listening to parts of his intervention in Arabic that included quotations from the Koran and which were repeated in French, Spanish and English. Even the local press and television echoed it. Later there were some small interventions by people, prominent in the local society, who wanted to express thanks for the presence of

the Church during these last sixty-five years. We also had some local representatives of the Ministry for Religious Affairs who insisted upon the beneficial coexistence of the two religions.

We ended the meetings with a fraternal ‘agape’ that allowed us to keep talking and dreaming so that we can keep walking together. And by dreaming this, even though many years distant, and in a very different context, we are simply sharing the Founder’s dream when he sent his Oblates to Algeria.

– Originally appeared in OMI world



Golden Jubilee of Fr. Mike Ryan OMI

Last August, together with other jubilarians, Mike celebrated his jubilee in Inchicore, Dublin. On December 20th, the date of his actual jubilee, he marked the occasion with the young people of Nantwich. Over the years, Mike has served in a variety of different ministries and places. Mike was ordained in his home parish of St Anne’s Rockferry. After ordination he taught RE in the local school in Stillorgan, Dublin and from there went for 6 years to Holyhead in 1971. This was followed by a move to Birmingham and on then it was on to Leith in Scotland for 4 years.

Mike next served in Jersey for 6 years before returning closer to home in 1989 to take up the position as director of the Oblate Retreat Centre in Wistaston Hall, Crewe. In the years that followed Mike served as parish priest in Norris Green, Amlwch and Colwyn Bay. Reflecting on his time in Amlwch, Mike recalls a highlight of his tenure was to save and renovate the iconic listed church which had fallen into disrepair. After a spell on sabbatical in Jerusalem and Australia he has done a full circle and landed back in Wistaston Hall!

Celebrating Lent & Easter at Wistaston Hall



The Call of Lent & St. Patrick

March 17th Day Retreat

This year we invite you to journey with St. Patrick and discover what this great saint can teach us as we journey through Lent. St. Patrick was held as a slave in Ireland for 6 years, yet upon gaining his freedom, he entered the Church and then decided to return to Ireland. This provides us with a good opportunity to focus on the idea of forgiveness and letting go of grudges. Lent is a time for personal reflection on where we are at in our lives. St. Patrick was responsible for countless people discovering the story of the Gospel and this will give us a chance to hear where God may be calling us today.

Holy Week 2020

Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Easter Sunday. It has its origin in the dramatic liturgies of the Jerusalem Church: the procession with palms; the washing of feet; the passion narratives; veneration of the cross and the Easter Vigil, with its focus on light in darkness, and rebirth through the water of baptism. As we approach these rituals in this retreat, we bring the challenges and gifts of our contemporary world as well as our personal lives, letting the prayerful symbols and actions embrace our longings.

This year we offer three different ways for you to share in the journey through Holy Week.

Palm Sunday Weekend Retreat

April 3rd – April 5th

As one of the most important days in the Christian calendar, Palm Sunday is a time when we reflect on the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry – from his entry into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to his final day on earth. It is also a time to prepare our hearts for Jesus' Passion and Resurrection. The Weekend will include reflective inputs on the mystery of Easter, times for prayer and some quiet, an opportunity (for those who want it) to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation or talk one-to-one with a trained Spiritual Director. Spend Palm Sunday Weekend in silent retreat saying "yes" to God.

Holy Week Retreat

April 5 – April 12

The 8-Day Directed Retreat provides you with individual direction in an environment of silence and prayer. A spiritual director meets with you each day, listens as you share your prayer experiences, helps you reflect on them and discover the path God is revealing to you. This facilitates a deepening of your relationship with God. In addition to our Triduum services, there will be morning prayer in the chapel on Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

Easter Triduum Retreat

April 9 – April 12

This is an opportunity for you to discover the Sacred "Three Days" (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday) leading up to Easter.

This retreat begins at 8pm on Holy Thursday with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the Washing of the Feet. It includes time for personal and communal prayer as well as the opportunity to fully participate in each of the services.

For more information or to book any of these retreats please contact: Fr. Lorcán or Rachel at director@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk or phone +44 (0) 1270 568653.



A New Vocations Mission

From 6th to 9th December last year, around the Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception, six Oblates joined together in London for a Vocations Mission, with the aim to promote religious vocations in our three Oblate communities around London.. With Mary, our Mother, watching over us and praying for us, our weekend was blessed with great success.

Our long weekend spent in London included time for communal prayer, meetings and planning for our activities, as well as time for fraternal community and the sharing of our religious life together. Saturday afternoon then saw our dispersion to various locations around London, where two by two we were sent out to preach our mission of vocations. Fr Eduardo and Br Michael visited the community at the Church of the English Martyrs in Tower Hill where they both had the opportunity to share their vocations story during the masses there. Fr John and Fr Johnson visited Immaculate Heart of Mary in West Kilburn and likewise preached their homilies on vocations, sharing much of their own stories. Finally, Br Joshua and Fr Dominik visited Sacred Heart Church in Quex Rd and delivered some sermons individually as well as together to engage the people of that community.

This was the first time in the recent history of this province that such a Vocations Mission team has

been assembled and sent out to preach in such a comprehensive way. The warm welcome, the smiles, the thanks and gratitude from parishioners after each mass showed just what kind of impact these missionaries made during their visit. All in all, there would have been at least 1000+ people that weekend who heard about Oblate vocations and have been urged to consider how they can contribute to vocations.

However, everyone was urged to discern what God is calling them to do with their lives; as everyone has a vocation, not just those called to the priesthood or religious life. No matter what age or gender you are there is a way in which you can live out your Christian vocation and there is a place for you in the Oblate family.

The most important thing that the Pope has told us we can do to promote vocations is to pray. Each of our Oblates urged the communities of London to join them in praying for vocations. Likewise, we extend the invitation to all of you, to please pray for vocations. Pray for an awareness of each person's God-given vocation, and please especially pray for young men and women to join the religious life with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. We look forward to our next Vocations mission which occurs in Dublin in February.





Friends of St Eugene

– Serving with an Oblate Spirit

The Friends of St Eugene were first established in February 2010. They have developed quite considerably since their first humble beginnings and today there are seven groups meeting on a monthly basis and combined they have over one hundred members.

It is important that they meet for Prayer and Friendship as these two pillars alongside Service are an integral part of the philosophy behind the foundation of the groups. The Mission statement of the Friends of St Eugene groups reads:

Friends of St. Eugene respond to the call to live the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod in their daily lives, in their unique way. They support each other through FRIENDSHIP, PRAYER and SERVICE to make a difference in their local area and so further the Reign of God.

The core values of Friendship, Prayer and Service are helping the Friends continue to develop closer community bonds. Here are some of the projects undertaken by the Friends in one month - December 2019.

The Crewe Friends of St. Eugene held a Taize prayer afternoon. A quiet reflective prayer which was followed by coffee and mince pies. They were joined by 4 members of the S Mary's parish for the event.

The Rock Ferry Friends of St. Eugene also organised a Taize afternoon of prayer for the parish as they have previously. About 30 Friends and parishioners attended. Some of the Friends attended the day of reflection at the Oblate Retreat Centre in Crewe. For this year's Advent project the Friends collected items in the parish to support the homeless project at the Charles Thompson Mission in Birkenhead. They also gave the parish the opportunity to send a Christmas card to a prisoner of conscience and in total over 40 cards were sent to ACAT-UK. After all that work the Friends met for a chat and a coffee before Christmas.

The Kilburn Friends of St. Eugene's Advent project was to provide Christmas gifts for users of the Porch, project run by the parish which provides a hot meal and company for homeless and lonely people once a week. Each member of the group bought a hat and socks and wrapped them. Also they each bought

a box of Christmas cards which were brought into Pentonville prison for the prisoners to send to their friends and families. The project ended with a Christmas party with plenty of food and music.

The Holyhead Friends of St. Eugene met together with the St. Vincent De Paul group in the parish. They collaborated in wrapping Christmas presents and writing Christmas cards which the group then delivered personally to the sick and housebound of the parish. They had a good time sharing stories over tea and cakes with the people they visited. Also on Anglesey, the Amlwch Friends of St. Eugene met together and experienced a beautiful Advent service of prayer.

The Birmingham Friends of St. Eugene had a time of silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Over a three week period, they collected from the parish, toiletries to support the local Homeless Refugee centre - Ceefar Fireside. A new initiative was taken on by the group. They offered to cook a Christmas lunch for parishioners to share. Twenty parishioners attended the event and there was plenty of food, drink and even dancing!

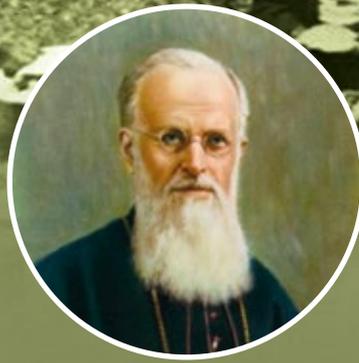
The Tower Hill Friends of St. Eugene saw the third annual Christmas lunch at the De Mazenod Centre which is attached to the parish Church of the English Martyrs. They served seventeen home-made, three course Christmas meals to a really diverse group of people who for various reasons were going to be on their own in London over the Christmas period. The diversity of the group included all ages, locations and professions. A young student from Mexico, guests from Colombia, the Philippines, Portugal, Ireland and also a smattering of Eastenders who are long term members of the parish.

The Friends are doing a great job building, quietly links in parishes, communities and with each other. May they continue to increase in number and find new projects to make St Eugene and his charism better known in 2020.

– Mary Tyrrell

If you would like to discover more about the Friends of St Eugene please contact Kirk at k.jacob@oblates.co.uk

“Venerable” Bishop Charlebois



Pope Francis declared Bishop Ovide Charlebois, the first apostolic vicar of Keewatin, Canada “Venerable” on November 28, 2019. For Fr Robert Laroche, OMI, former vicar general of Keewatin, the papal announcement is “a real source of pride... Bishop Charlebois was an extraordinary man, who gave his entire life to serving indigenous communities.”

Ovide Charlebois was born in Oka, Quebec, in 1862. The seventh of fourteen children, he was ordained in 1887 and immediately began working in Saskatchewan, establishing a school, teaching and traveling thousands of miles by snowshoe, dogsled, and canoe to minister to the Métis and aboriginal communities. “It’s particularly fitting that the pope took this decision in 2019, the United Nations year of Aboriginal Languages, notes Fr Robert Laroche. Ovide Charlebois spoke Ojibway and Cree, and a little bit of Dene. For him, reaching out to First Nations peoples in their own languages was vitally important. It wasn’t simply a matter of communicating clearly to them; it was a sign of deep respect. In fact, he insisted that each new missionary took a whole year to learn aboriginal languages before they began their service in the various indigenous communities and missions.”

Ovide Charlebois was 48 years old when he was named the first apostolic vicar of Keewatin, in 1910. Father Laroche notes that “he built the cathedral of The Pas with his own hands”. “He also founded many, many missions. I served at St. Theresa Point, where he celebrated the first mass there. I also followed in his footsteps at Brochet. It’s truly amazing the distances he travelled. He was quite the backwoodsman.”

He must have covered thousands of miles. And he continued to do so up until his death in 1933, at the age of 71. He was a man of deep faith and action.”

Before Bishop Charlebois can be beatified, the Vatican must recognize that a miracle has occurred through his intercession. “I wouldn’t be surprised if that happens, notes father Laroche. In 1997, an elder from St. Theresa Point had a tumour. On his way to St. Boniface for an operation, he and other faithful spent some time praying at the Cathedral in The Pas, where bishop Charlebois’ remains are buried. Later, in St. Boniface, x-rays confirmed that the tumour was gone. Of course, this event needs to be looked at carefully. But it is a testimony to how much Bishop Charlebois was loved and admired.”

– Br Joshua Nash, OMI

O God whose servant Bishop Charlebois strove with admirable fortitude, patience and humility to bring Thy reign of love into a wilderness, make us like him, steadfast in virtue and grant us through his intercession the special grace... which we ask of Thy infinite goodness. Through Christ Our Lord.

Answers to the Christmas Quiz

- 1) John the Baptist, by about six months
- 2) none
- 3) Oh Come, All Ye Faithful
- 4) The Shepherds
- 5) 3
- 6) Caesar Augustus decreed a census to be taken
- 7) The City of David
- 8) Isaiah
- 9) six
- 10) To worship Him
- 11) The Bible doesn’t say
- 12) Charles Wesley
- 13) Henry John Gauntlett
- 14) Noel means birthday. In the Middle Ages a call of “Noel, noel, noel!” would indicate that an important birth was about to be announced.
- 15) It doesn’t.
- 16) During His crucifixion, Jesus was offered a drink of wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:23).
- 17) The carol is “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,” which expresses a longing for peace on earth.
- 18) Quirinius (Luke 2:2)
- 19) Answer: Tamar (Matt. 1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (Matt. 1:5), Bathsheba (Matt. 1:6)
- 20) A) Silent Night
B) O come all ye faithful
C) O Holy Night

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