



Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.25, 8th December, 2014

Welcome to our December issue of Connections. If there is one word to capture the theme of this issue it would be “celebration”. It is very clear that we have much to celebrate and give thanks to God. Indeed, St. Eugene reminds us that we have “duties of love and thanksgiving which are due to God, Father of mercy, who is never deaf to the prayer of those who place all their trust in him.”

We’re all well aware that the weeks prior to Christmas are such a busy time. There is scarcely time to go to church. There is scarcely time to be by oneself, let alone to pray. So often we allow the urgent take

us away from the necessary! In the busyness of life, we need to stop and to ask ourselves like the Wise Men did: ‘Where is the King? Where is Jesus for me? Where is Jesus in all the rush and fuss as we prepare for Christmas?’

I pray that during this season of Advent we will find some time to pause and give thanks for the great gift that we will soon celebrate at Christmas. As we journey towards our annual celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ may we be open to the blessings that we need and strengthened to share the Good News which is truly the greatest gift we can give to others.

- Fr. Lorcán O’Reilly

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Reasons to Celebrate Christmas	2
Young People Reaching Out in Edinburgh	3
Oblate Congress 2014	4
Celebrating our Oblate Jubilarians	8
Safe Haven	10
Talitakum Centre Uruguay	11
Anglesey Centre of Mission	12
Bishop Kevin Dowling - A prophet in our own time	14
Events for 2015	16





Reasons to Celebrate Christmas

– Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI

For many people the thought of Christmas brings fatigue. It's not the religious aspect that causes the tiredness, but the overdrawn rituals that surround it: the overly decorated shops, the constrictive shopping, the lights, the Santas, the Christmas trees, and the carols that begin to echo through our malls already in early November.

And so it is asked: What has all of this, or any of it, got to do with the birth of Jesus? Hasn't Advent, which is supposed to be a time of preparation for the feast, become an exhausting ordeal that brings us to Christmas day already saturated with what we were supposed to be building up to? Wouldn't we honour Jesus more if we spend the money we lavish on Christmas on the poor instead? Don't our Christmas celebrations serve to obliterate our awareness of Jesus' birth more than highlight it? Valid questions.

Our Christmas celebrations, admittedly, do start too early, are too-commercially driven, do focus too little on anything religious, and do not take the poor sufficiently into account. Too often too they serve to obliterate religious awareness rather than highlight it. And so it is easy to be cynical about Christmas. It contains too many excesses.

However, with that being conceded, we need to be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water – and that is more than a pun in this case. Because something is done badly does not mean it should be cancelled. What is called for, I believe, is not the cancellation of the tinsel, the lights, the socials, the food, and the drink that surround Christmas, but a better use of them. There are good reasons to cancel the rituals with which we surround Christmas, but there are even better reasons for keeping them.

What are those reasons? Why continue so many of these rituals when, almost invariably, they degenerate into excess and fatigue? Because we have a congenital need to celebrate, pure and simple. As human beings we have a healthy, God-given, genetically-encoded need to sometimes make festival, to have carnival, to celebrate an elaborate Sabbath, to park our prudence for a few hours, and to live life as if there wasn't any reason to pinch our pennies or to be cold to our neighbors. Christmas is Sabbath, the supreme Sabbath.

There are seasons in life, and these should be on a regular cycle, that are meant precisely for enjoyment, for family, for friends, for colour, for tinsel and for good food and good drink, There is even the occasional time for some prudent excess. Jesus gave voice to this when his disciples were scandalized by a woman's excess in anointing his feet with perfume and kisses.

All cultures, not least those who are economically poor, have times of festival where, explicitly or implicitly, they take seriously the words: The poor you will always have with you, but today it is time to celebrate. Christmas is such a time, meant for festival.

John Shea, in his now-classic book on Christmas, *Starlight*, tells the story of a family who decided one year to celebrate an alternative Christmas. They did not put up a tree, did not string up any lights, played no carols, and did not exchange gifts. They met for a simple, quiet meal on Christmas day. Asked by friends how it all went over, one family member replied that it "was pleasant". Another member, perhaps speaking more honestly, stated that it was "an existential abyss".

There is a God-given pressure inside of us that pushes us to celebrate and instills in us an irrepressible sense that we are not meant for poverty, gloom, and carefully measured-out relationships, but that we are meant ultimately for the feast, the dance, the place of lights and music, and the place where we don't measure out our pennies and our hearts on the basis of having to survive and pay mortgages. The celebration of festival and carnival, even with their excesses, help teach us that. Christmas is such a festival. In the end, its celebration is a lesson in faith and hope, even when it isn't as strong a lesson in prudence.

To make a festival of Christmas, to surround Jesus' birthday with all the joy, light, music, gift-giving, energy, and warmth we can muster is, strange as this may sound, a prophetic act. It is, or at least it can be, an expression of faith and hope. It's not the person who says: "It's rotten, let's cancel it!" who radiates hope. That can easily be despair masquerading as faith. No. It is the man or woman who, despite the world's misuse and abuse of these, still strings up the Christmas lights, trims the tree and the turkey, turns up the carols, passes gifts to loved ones, sits down at table with family and friends, and flashes a grin to the world, who is radiating faith, who is saying that we are meant for more than gloom, who is celebrating Jesus' birth.



Young People Reaching Out

Living in Edinburgh I was aware there is a certain degree of poverty but I had no idea just how much poverty that there actually is...

Walking through town it is not uncommon to see homeless people begging but the general assumption amongst the public is that they have gotten there "through their own bad choices". This leads to little empathy and even less understanding towards these people that are at the end of the day, people too.

Perhaps volunteering at a soup kitchen is not the usual extra-curricular activity that every 17-year-old girl can see herself doing but, when the chance arose to volunteer for St Mary Star of the Sea in Leith, as part of the 'Caritas Award', I jumped at it. I have always been eager to try new things and meet interesting people and this way I felt I could at least do some good along the way. My first week attending the soup kitchen that is run by the Missionaries of Charity, I anticipated twenty men, all older and unwashed. That could not have been farther from the truth. In reality there was closer to sixty, both men and women. There was a greater amount of men but more shockingly there was a worrying amount of young people attending. I also learnt that the soup kitchen does not only serve soup; I naively assumed this before going there, showing the ignorance that I once had towards the subject.

The soup kitchen has shone a bright light onto the astounding degree of poverty in Edinburgh and the vast range of people that it affects. The soup kitchen offers food, that's all, the people that attend are there because they cannot afford to feed themselves and struggle to make ends meet. In the age we live in it seems so ludicrous that people fall so low that they have to do this. People end up in such extreme poverty

through all different reasons. A number of people make bad choices that are unfortunately down to their own personal mistakes, others are just victims of poor circumstances. Either way these people need help, no one consciously makes choices so that they will be in such deep poverty relying on a soup kitchen to survive.

Through my hours at the soup kitchen it has shown me not to take life for granted, nothing is guaranteed. There's something so simple about helping these people that helps me too, it's about giving people their dignity back. Treating people like they are people, not invisible. They are the thankful ones but ironically it is me that is so thankful to them and they have no idea. Just by helping it has opened my eyes to all the good that can be achieved in this world through the smallest of gestures. They've shown me that there is so much more to life than money and materialistic joys. Somehow these people always manage a thank you with or without a smile; their strength to carry on is admirable. Particularly one man who is there every time I've been and every time he says thank you to me for giving up my time: it's two hours on a Friday. I'm not giving up anything compared to everything he has lost but he says it anyway. These people are kind and polite but they need help to get their lives back on track by more work schemes, better and affordable housing and a greater awareness of poverty. If everyone plays their small part a change can be made to help these people get their lives back on track.

– Kitty Higgins, Holy Rood High School



Oblate Congress 2014

Fr. Chicho Rois OMI is a member of the Oblate Leadership team in Rome and is the General Councillor for Europe. He was invited to the Congress as a listener and the following is a summary of his reflection which he entitled, “Listening by Heart.”

Fr Chicho began by thanking everybody present for the gift of their presence and participation during the Congress. He repeated the view held by many “We need more time” and “to take our time to really understand this “grace event”. He was keen to restate that something we need to do when working on our priorities is, “to look at what happens from the other angle, from the other perspective.” Not an easy task but one that will ensure lasting, strong and equal partnerships.

Fr Chicho urged delegates, “Please, take your time, personally and in conversation with your local community”. “Everybody is invited to be engaged in a conversation to build up relationship and to grow in faith and life” so that we deepen our faith experience and grow in our human and Christian experience. All such conversations need to be as inclusive as possible and thus will inevitably face difficulties and possible conflict. Recognising that one of the challenges we face in our local communities is of creating, increasing and expanding relationships, Fr Chicho invited us to engage in listening with our hearts. “Because listening by heart and being inclusive is a way to discover God’s presence in our midst and yes, we have to include God in our conversation.”

We are all on the same journey and share the same mission. We just need to know and agree the direction we are following – together. For, it is true that despite all the wonderful planning, programmes and preparation that might be developed to implement change, the most important experience of change has to be the change itself.

“Vatican II Council gives us the image of the Church as the People of God marching.” The challenge is walking together, respecting different rhythms and views but most importantly, being together. Fr Chicho shared an inspirational text from the Professed Oblate constitutions and rules, “Growing in faith, hope and love, we commit ourselves to be a leaven of the Beatitudes at the heart of the world” C. 11.

He suggested that walking together to seed the Beatitudes in the heart of the world is the way forward of Living Mission Together.

St. Eugene de Mazenod said we are co-workers with Jesus in his Mission, bringing the Joy of the Gospel to the poor. Fr Chicho continued “The image of the Cross made by shaking hands speaks to me about the partnership in the Mission. We have to shake hands in equality and complementarity to embrace the cross of Jesus and embrace all the crucified of our days.



In other words we have to help each other to hold true to the Oblate charism and mission. And so our partnership has to be about developing a deep and loving relationship among us and with the poor. The poor are at the heart of the spirituality and experience of St Eugene.

Fr Chicho quoted Pope Francis as an inspiration for us. "I would like a poor Church and for the poor". Lately, the Pope has added to this statement: "Not only FOR the poor but WITH the poor."

We are challenged to allow ourselves to be evangelised by the poor, to journey with them and to learn from them. It would without doubt change our attitudes and actions if we put the poor at the centre of all the priorities of the Anglo Irish Oblate family. But, that is what we are called to do as sharers in the Oblate charism if we sincerely want to change today's unjust society.

Integrity of creation is a challenge but not forgetting the Justice and Peace issues, Fr Chicho linked "take care of the creation, "a phrase used often during the Congress with our priority to the poor adding " how much we have to learn from nature itself and from the indigenous people and from our own traditional cultures."

In conclusion, Fr Chicho invited us to look at this image of the Trinity: The Father, the Son and Spirit taking care of wounded humanity. Pope Francis uses the image of the Church as a Field Hospital because our mission is to take care of wounded people. Not only has Pope Francis shown us that change is possible but he has demonstrated the way forward.

Finishing with words of encouragement Fr Chicho concluded, "It is possible to incarnate the Gospel! It is possible to be a sign of the loving God for the humanity! The contemplation of this image of the Trinity can give us the strength and inspiration we need to become a sacrament of God's love for the poor; to grow in communion in our communities, deepening our relationships, walking together and being partners in the Trinity Mission, working for and with the Poor and walking in faith, hope and love."

- Mary Tyrrell





A flavour from the Participants

Congress opened with a very interesting and highly challenging address by Fr. Gerry O'Hanlon. He began with these words: " We live in exciting and hopeful times for our Church, inspired by a Bishop of Rome, who has captured the world's imagination and who has begun to make the Church seem attractive again".

Our final session was highly significant. We were requested to meet in our local mission communities, and seek to agree on three action points arising out of what we had heard and shared, and then formally pledge to implement these locally during the next twelve months. May we respond to the Spirit's guidance during this work. Thus Congress 2014 will not have been a one off event, but rather a launching pad for the future.

- Fr. Tony Clancy OMI

Arriving at Emmaus in the pouring rain, I was thankful for my umbrella, and for the hot coffee and smile of welcome that I received, a friendly atmosphere that continued right through the Congress. After a busy three days at Emmaus, tired but encouraged and hopeful, I want to continue my Oblate journey. I cadged a warm lift home and didn't need to use my brolly. Good start.

- Fr. Michael OMI

From meeting my fellow travellers from Anglesey on the Tuesday morning to returning back on the Thursday evening, I had a truly amazing time. It was a real pleasure to meet the other delegates from all over the Anglo Irish Province and beyond and there was a real sense of being part of a large family which made the work over the three days feel really inclusive. Back home, I look forward to working more closely within our OMI family on Anglesey and beyond to ensure that the energy from the Congress continues to grow and is shared with others.

- Sue Roberts, Anglesey



I made some new friends, and always remember this: though friendship may not remove a person's troubles and difficulties; it softens the blow and strengthens the will.

- Nora Lennon,
Oblate Lourdes Pilgrimage Leadership Team

I wasn't sure what to expect, apart from long intense input sessions followed by small group work. But it was also much more - moments of joy, wonder, surprise and awe:

The presentation on the beauty of the world and the wonder of people: that was the first time I've heard someone speak of the wonder of a spider's web in the context of the Trinity!

The interview-style chat with people telling of their experiences with adults in deepening awareness and faith... simple, humourous and profound; the privilege of hearing someone talk about their dreams and hopes; the confidence that comes from being listened to, attentively; the joy of heartfelt shared laughter which erupted during the small group meetings; the utter surprise of meeting someone not seen for years.

- Fr. Dermot Mills OMI

From the initial address, to the closing liturgy, Congress 2014 was a time of highlighting the importance in recognising a church undergoing change. The need for partnership between clergy and lay people in mission has never been so great; indeed 'partnership' was demonstrated by two lay people sharing input about their own ministry within the church. It was helpful to be reminded that, in our imperfections, we are all 'Living Mission Together' and that it is God's work we carry out.

Trish Middlemist, Edinburgh

This was my first experience at our Provincial Congress and I must say it was an extraordinary and spiritual experience. Despite the fact that the three days were packed with very tight schedules, I felt connected with the Oblates and other lay delegates on a journey into what felt like an unknown future, but felt this sense of guided direction and confidence to keep going. The congress highlighted for me thought provoking reality of the future of our Church, the challenges ahead, the inevitable changes to come, but I came away more determined to 'keep the flame of faith alive'.

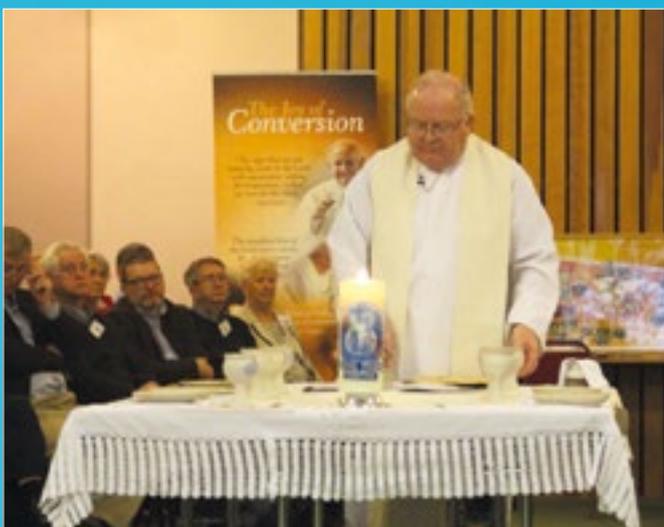
- Chris Kolade, London

Excellent presentations can create a euphoria which in turn produces very aspirational goals - so aspirational in fact that they fade away in the light of reality. This time however I felt we had a hard look at that very reality in our various ministries and in spite of, or because of that, the whole process funnelled down into that series of pledges which are realistic. They are challenging but achievable; measurable and monitorable. I feel sure that, in our various ministries we will be driven to fulfill that "tick list" of pledges - fitting outcome to a great congress.

- Barbara McCauley,
Mission Development Office, Dublin.

I was invited to the Oblate Congress to represent the Oblate Youth Service. At the Congress I met many amazing people who share the same goal as the Youth Service, in wanting to help people and help strengthen our own faith. I feel that the Congress has given me the opportunity to learn more about the various groups who make up the Oblate Community, and to also share who the Oblate Youth Service are and the work that we do. The Congress was extremely informative about what the Oblate Community as a whole plan to do and continue to do in the future and I can confidently share with the OYS all that I have learned from this experience.

- Amy Kiernan, Oblate Youth Service



Living Mission Together, the Congress event, might be over but the work continues. On the final morning, delegates met to consider priorities, referred to as pledges, for their Centres of Mission and local area groups in the light of all they had heard at the Congress.

Delegates were asked to take the Pledges back to their local communities and ministries. They are to be discussed locally and can be amended where necessary. The Pledges promised all showed a great depth of commitment and they all relate to and support our Oblate priorities. It is hoped that as many people as possible will be involved in the accomplishment of the Pledges. Delegates were encouraged to use all local communications means and to hold meetings to inform and update people about the work.

We are, most definitely "all in this together!"

Celebrating Our Oblate Jubilarians

Fr. Tom Murphy celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his Ordination to the priesthood this year. A celebration was held in Inchicore to mark all this years Jubilarians and below you will find Fr. Tom's homily for this happy occasion.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote: "I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder". I suggest that these words are an apt summary of our reason for being here today. The prevailing sentiment is one of thanks: thanks for our life, thanks for family and friends, thanks for our vocation to priesthood and religious life. This sense of gratitude makes of our Jubilarians happy men. Their happiness is gratitude and this happiness is doubled by wonder - the sense of wonder that by God's grace we have been called - not because of our holiness, or intellectual brilliance, but because God calls whom He wills. He does not choose the capable, but makes capable those He chooses. Our Jubilarians would ask again today, as they have often asked in the past: Why me?

What did I do to deserve all this - the gift of life, the gift of family, of vocation, the privilege of being present to their people at the threshold experiences of their lives.

And how better to express this gratitude, this wonder than around this altar celebrating this Eucharist which is the thankful celebration of the mystery of the Man/God Jesus who envelops us in the wonder and mystery of His life, death and resurrection. And as we

pray in the Preface of the Mass; "It is right and fitting that we be here today to thank and be filled with wonder at what God brings about in us and through us - all of us!

What we celebrate today can only be understood in the light of faith. For the secular world our religious life and priesthood make no sense. In a world in which everything has been relativized, where traditional values have become counter values, we can only understand priesthood and religious in the context of faith...

In the Gospel Jesus seems to turn everything upside down, back-ways to our way of thinking.

* - it is not the big donation of the rich that is important, but the small offering of the widow.

* - It is not the legalistic purity of the Pharisees that pleases God, but the intensity of the prostitute's love - "she has loved much".

* - It is not the pretentious prayer of the Pharisee that get God's attention, but it is the publican's humble prayer from the back of the temple that moves the Father... And so on...

* - He who is rich is poor, he who is weak is strong. He who is persecuted is victorious. He who loses his life shall gain it. If the seed does not fall into the ground and die...



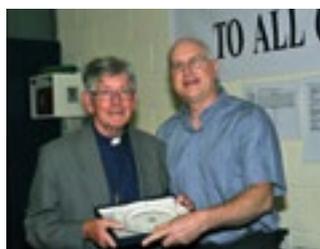
Strange reasoning, strange logic. God's thoughts are not our thoughts...

A great theologian has described the priesthood and religious life as a sharing of and a radiating of our experience of God, - not a vindictive God, not a vengeful God, not a punishing God, but a God who walks with his people, the God of Exodus Ch.3: "I have seen the suffering of my people... I have heard their cry and know their suffering. For this reason I have come down to free them from the power of the Egyptians..."

And I submit this is what our Jubilarians have endeavoured to do in their priestly and religious life. They have radiated the justice of God through their thirst for justice. They have radiated the tenderness of God through their preoccupation and love for the sick and the elderly. They have radiated the divine intelligence through their intellectual capacity put at the service of others. They have radiated the goodness of the Father through their kindness, a kindness that sees the face of Christ in the face of the weak, the excluded, the little ones of this world. They have radiated the compassion of Christ. They have been present at the most important, the threshold experiences of people's lives - at birth, at the onset of adulthood, at marriage, in the autumn years of people's lives, and have prepared them to meet their God.

And they were present in their people's lives not as mere professionals but as men of compassion. A Jewish author, Abraham Joshua Heschel puts it this way. "A religious man is a person who holds God and man in one thought at one time, at all times, who suffers harm done to others, whose greatest passion is compassion, whose greatest strength is love and defiance of despair".

In each face here there is a history: a shared endeavour, a felt hope, a dream dreamed, a task completed. Or perhaps a frustration, a disappointment, a defeat.



But always there is Life - life lived, learned and celebrated. These men have dust on their sandals, wrinkles on their face, but remain always youthful, with dreams in their hearts, dreams that are greater, more powerful than all the attempts to stifle them, dreams that shine forth in the lives of those who believe, who hope and who love. The poet Brendan Kennelly puts it well:

"Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
That always seems about to give in
Something that will not acknowledge conclusion
Insists that we forever begin."

Today is a day when we remember in a special way our beloved parents, brothers and sisters, who were with us at our Ordination and are now surely with their God.

And finally, a special word of thanks to you, family members, relatives and friends of our Jubilarians. You have accompanied them on their journey. Your prayer, your support, your loyalty, your welcome, the sheer goodness of your lives have been a tremendous support and bulwark through life. You will never know what it has meant to these men to have you welcome them home, when they were tired and possibly discouraged. They returned to their mission rested, refreshed, and secure in your support and love for them. They always knew you were there for them. Please know, please be certain that they are deeply, deeply grateful. May your prayer and support for our Jubilarians continue.

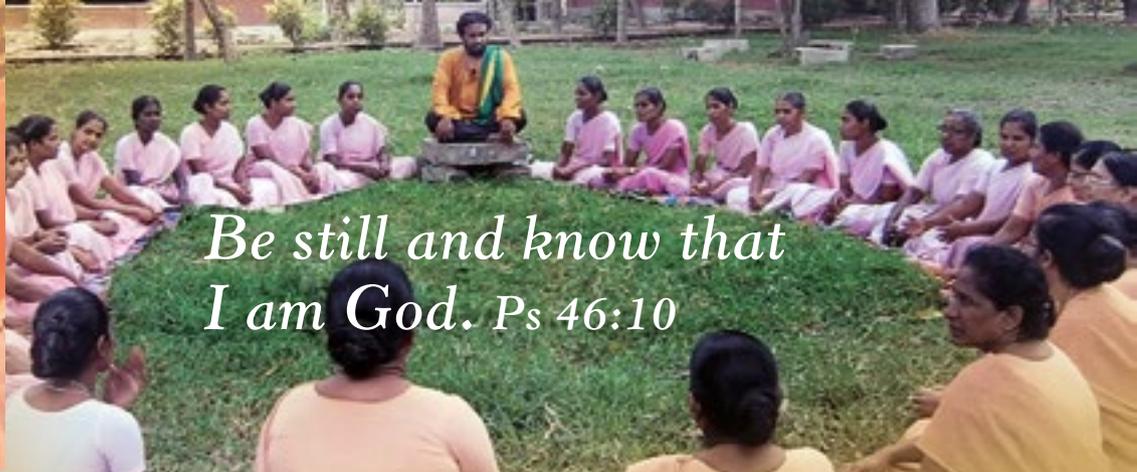
My dear Jubilarians, may we have many more years of happiness and fulfillment in our ministry. May we continue to give to those to whom they minister the hope and compassion they have been called to give. And even after 25, 40, 50, 60, 65 years of religious life and priesthood may "a field of dreams continue to open out ahead of us. May we continue to give of ourselves with the same determination, the same enthusiasm, the same creativity, the same gratuitousness as when we started out. The poet T.S. Eliot expresses this well:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time"





Swami Joseph



*Be still and know that
I am God. Ps 46:10*

Safe Haven

The Oblate Ashram christened Aanmodaya (awakening to the divine self within) was established by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1990 at Enathur, Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu, in the southern part of India. It provides a sacred space where people of all walks of life irrespective of creed, nationality, religion, gender, language or caste can come to experience the Divine and/or the silence of nature, or just to rest their tired limbs to regain strength for their continued pilgrimage of life.

The ashram was blessed open in February 1992 with late Swami Amalraj Jesudass as the guru. There has always been a core Oblate community assisted by brothers, sisters and other helpers.

Swami Joseph Samarakone OMI is one of the early members of the community and has long been involved in inter-religious dialogue and in the inculturation of the Church in India. For Fr. Joseph, "the 'kingdom' of Jesus' vision embraces all peoples, all religions, all cultures, even people who have no religion and, therefore all ideologies and all life-realities of the people. Thus the kingdom is larger than the Church".

Meditation is given the pride of place. The core Oblate community spends time in meditation, celebration of the Eucharist and Tri Samdhya, which means the meeting of people and God at the three important hours of morning, noon and evening.

At the end of every meditation we particularly spend a few moments to send peace vibrations to people, events and places where the Lord's peace is needed. The midday prayer is totally dedicated to world peace.

The ashram also provides a focus on inter-religious dialogue. In our temple we have the Scriptures of all major religions, and the pillars are adorned with the symbols of all the major religions of the world. This makes the people of different religions feel comfortable to come and experience the silent atmosphere of the place, as well as pray and meditate, leading to communion

with the Divine. People come asking to be initiated into meditation and yoga, a service we offer with great joy.

People from India and all the continents have been coming here to experience life in an ashram as well as to be exposed to inculturation and inter-religious dialogue. The visitors from overseas appreciate the thrust we give on inter-religious dialogue and inculturation. All the major seminaries, particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu, send students of theology for specific programs, especially for Indian Christian spirituality and ashram experience. Many religious women congregations send their sisters in large numbers for retreats based on Indian Christian spirituality. They spend time in meditation and are exposed to the Scriptures of other religions. The Bible and other Scriptures are used in our prayer and Liturgy that are always inculturated. They partake of the simple vegetarian meal and contribute their share of manual work to keeping the ashram clean.

We have resource persons who animate the participants on the need to care for the environment and on holistic health and values that often dovetail into the teachings of the major religious traditions. Recently we have introduced pre-marital and family counselling, training in value education and eco-spirituality.

As part of our social concern we feed the hungry who come to the ashram, take interest in the growth of some orphan children and visit patients in nearby hospitals. We pray for ongoing generosity to maintain and develop this Oblate ashram so more people can be served. In this way, we hope everyone can share in this beautiful ministry.

- M. Chinnappan Mari Susai OMI,
director of the Aanmodaya Ashram





Talitakum Centre, Uruguay

- Seven years old and growing

Seven years ago, the Oblates at San Rafael Parish in the Cerro region of Montevideo welcomed the first students at the Talitakum Centre. The center gets its name from the story of the daughter of Jairus in Capernaum: a 12 year-old girl whom Jesus restores to life and to her family. It is a learning community that carries on the project of Jesus in its many aspects: schooling, recreation, sports, psycho-sociological and affective aspects, etc. It is an attempt to recreate a family atmosphere where the young people can grow “in wisdom and grace.”

In the first group, there were 20 young people. This year, the school year began with 60 youth who had abandoned their studies and were in risk of wandering the streets all day long, without any hope for the future. At Talitakum, they have the opportunity to take classes in electricity, cooking, metal work, computers and sewing.

Their reality is very difficult, both because of the socioeconomic situation of their families and because of their environment. The whole educational community (teachers, kitchen staff and cleaners, social worker, psychologist and Oblates) are working hard with the youngsters and their families to change their situation for the better so that they might help themselves. Sometimes, they seem to be paddling against the current and that is really the most difficult thing. For us it is important not to “lose” any of those who come to us, even if they are sometimes deprived of their liberty because of theft or behavior not entirely correct.

The students, through their workshops, also lend a hand outside of the centre: those in the kitchen by preparing desserts and sandwiches for meetings or gatherings; those who are learning the trade of metal workers by making railings, gates and waste bins for other institutions as well as grills, planters and windows for their homes. The boys in electricity installed the electrical system of our new hall and they sometimes help the teachers with small jobs. Our “tailors or seamstresses” made aprons and hats for the kitchen workers and have learned how to make pants, shirts, jackets and beautiful party dresses. Those in computers have made videos about their activities and are beginning to update computers that are several years old.

Talitakum is really loved by our parish community and beyond. In October, there was a charity bazaar to raise money. Everyone collaborated, some preparing gifts; some cooking sausages and fried pastries; some operating the various game booths; others taking a “stroll” around the centre to prevent any mischief – and there is always some; some putting on a little entertainment; and many others offering their time and talents for the delight of all.

This is very different from the Talitakum of 2007, but there is the same joy and the same desire to help these youth as much as possible.

- Fr. Antonio MESSERI for Procura delle Missioni OMI



Anglesey Centre of Mission - Canolfan Genhadaeth Mon

Earlier this year, over the weekend 16th -18th of May, the faith communities that make up the Anglesey Centre of Mission in North Wales, joined together to celebrate twenty years of “Think Island” - twenty years of developing relationships between the members of our eight faith communities on Anglesey, where we have worked together to offer diverse opportunities to all members of our communities and others to help enhance their spiritual development.

The idea to pause, think about our journey as a Centre of Mission and to celebrate our successes came about as a result of our review in 2013. One of our areas for development is to celebrate our achievements so that all involved would become more aware of the many opportunities available to the members of the “communion of communities” as well as being energised to develop further.

The need to celebrate was reinforced by John Mannix, Director of Schools for the Catholic Diocese of Plymouth, who spent two weekends with us discussing the roles of priests and laity in true partnership. He encouraged us to continue our work and argued that it is an essential part of our mission to review progress, celebrate and then proceed.

Our original aims were to be: -

- A proclaiming community which is a living witness to Christ on our island and, in partnership with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, proclaims the good news to the people around us;
- A welcoming community which is gathered together in weakness and strength by the spirit of Jesus to nurture its faith by sharing the Word in small groups, breaking the bread, remembering and celebrating God’s love for us;
- A missioning community which invites people to discover the richness of the Christian faith in the Catholic tradition and reaches out in solidarity especially to those who are poor and marginalised.

The eight communities make up the three parishes on the island and our aim was to hold at least one event in each parish area.

We began the weekend of celebration with over eighty people from all over the island attending a social evening in the Parish Hall in Amlwch on the evening of Friday 16th May.



On Saturday morning over one hundred people ignored the temptation of the beautiful weather to work with local and national workshop leaders, including Fr. Kevin McLaughlin OMI, Sister Teresa Brittain nds and a host of “home grown” talent. Workshops included the Development of Jewish Christian Relationships since Vatican II, Breathing Spaces – Spiritual Conversation, Integrating Life and Faith, New Directions in Spirituality, Blessed William Davies, and Celebrating through Art and Movement.

In the afternoon everybody stayed to listen to an inspirational talk given by David Wells, Director for Parish Formation, Diocese of Plymouth, which re-energised us and encouraged us to continue our mission on Anglesey.

Before we left Holyhead, we were “wowed” by our newly formed, very own Gospel Choir, which had met for the first time in the morning and practiced all day under the expert guidance of Hermione Thomas.

We have to ask ourselves where else in the United Kingdom would so many people give up their sunny Saturday to join together as a communion of communities?

A select band ignored the effects of a long, fantastic day to celebrate in Llangefni Town Hall. Fr. Dennis Connor OMI and some members of the Gospel Choir also entertained us – you just had to be there to believe it!

Without denying the successes of Friday and Saturday, perhaps we saved the best until last. About two hundred and fifty people gathered to celebrate Mass in Beaumaris Castle. The principal celebrant was the Right Reverend Peter Brignall, Bishop of Wrexham. Fr. Ray Warren, OMI Provincial, preached the homily. The Mass was truly uplifting, a fitting conclusion to our weekend. After Mass, Reverend Neil Fairlamb, vicar of St. Mary’s Church in Wales, Beaumaris and his community provided refreshments in his church.

Fr. Damian Jackson SJ, who concelebrated, wrote to say-
 “It was a real joy to be with you; a vision of “future Church” which you and your Island team have already made a present reality.”

During the weekend of Island - wide activities we worked together, played together and worshipped together as a true communion of communities. We strive to be “welcoming, inclusive and outward looking” (“Croesawgar, Cynhwysol ac Eangfrydig”) and we are pleased that despite some difficulties, occasional setbacks and several false starts we are justifiably able to celebrate the successes, achievements and progress we have made as a Centre of Mission.

- John Tierney



Bishop Kevin Dowling

A prophet in our own time

On his recent visit to Britain, Bishop Kevin Dowling of South Africa's Rustenburg Diocese, spoke to packed audiences in Edinburgh, Birmingham and Westminster Cathedral Hall. It was my privilege to be among the audience at St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, to hear Bishop Kevin's commitment to marginalised people in his own diocese and to peace as co-president of Pax Christi in all countries torn asunder by violence. What follows are highlights from the questions and challenges raised by Bishop Kevin and his responses in the light of Pope Francis letter to the Church entitled "The Joy of the Gospel" (Evangelii Gaudium).

On the Church today

In Evangelii Gaudium, 'The Joy of the Gospel', Pope Francis, makes clear what he believes the Catholic community should be in the world... ..a Church that will be experienced as merciful and compassionate, a Church called to be courageous in its willingness to change and be inserted into the reality of the poor and suffering of the world...

'I dream of a missionary option; that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, can suitably be channelled for the evangelisation of today's world, rather than for her self-preservation.' (E G)

These are the words of a true pastor who knows and feels the suffering of the sheep, but who also knows that the conventional responses may no longer be relevant nor meaningful to that reality, and that unless the worldwide Church finds a 'new way' to transmit and make meaningful the 'Good News' of Jesus, we risk consigning that message to irrelevance.

On the challenge today?

How can we tell all these suffering people: 'God loves you'? How can we enable suffering people to feel, to experience, that God loves them? The prophetic responses of Hurley and Romero always proceeded from very personal experiences of the suffering of the 'little ones' of their society which both of them prayerfully analysed in the context of Jesus and the Gospel, and which led them to make choices which reflected



the option of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth:... 'to bring good news to the poor, to open the eyes of the blind, to set the downtrodden free...'

On the role of the church in the world?

Bishop Kevin highlighted dehumanising poverty and misery, the endemic corruption by governments, violence, wars, human trafficking, rape and abuse of women and children, and a lack of hope for their future, etc... ..which should be at the centre of the Church's vision and mission of evangelisation...so that as a Church we can offer some hope to those who suffer.

Bishop Kevin questioned: Are all these issues perceived to be on the periphery of what the Church 'does', that these are questions that a few people engage with as part of the Church's work, but are not central to who and what we are as Church?

His response challenged us: We cannot expect the poor and vulnerable ones of our societies to develop and practise a spiritual life, to find the Eucharist a meaningful celebration, to experience catechesis as bringing Jesus into their human reality etc... ..unless we as Church are seen to be involved in the very struggles of the poor and vulnerable for a minimally decent life. And that means that the Church leadership, in particular, must be seen to be engaged in advocacy and efforts to transform the lot of the poor...to be 'out there' in the real world, 'on the peripheries' as Pope Francis has called for more than once...to 'smell like the sheep...'



On the HIV/ Aids virus

Bishop Kevin spoke of his personal conscious commitment to victims of the virus to ‘hold the hands’ of the sick and vulnerable and dying women, men and children in his diocese and elsewhere. For him, Aids is not merely a health issue...it is a justice issue in the full sense of that word. Infection, sickness, misery and death are only part of the story. There is the stigma and discrimination, which holds back many from seeking the help and support that is available. Some people even promote the theory that Aids is a ‘punishment from God’... projecting a pre-occupation with sex and sin, and ignoring the social sin that is the cause of so much injustice, poverty and exclusion of the vulnerable, the root cause of the disease.

On Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic Social Teaching principle of the ‘preferential option for the poor’ is not optional. We cannot limit the ‘preferential option for the poor’ to works of charity which will alleviate in some way their sufferings... works of charity are important, but are not enough if we as Church are to be faithful to a holistic vision of evangelisation. It means we as Church, according to the gifts of the Spirit given to us, must be engaged in a prayerful analysis of the causes of dehumanisation, and misery, and then engage in action for change in the lives of the suffering. It is very difficult to transform all forms of injustice and abuse of human rights, so that our people can begin to believe what Jesus promised: ‘I have come that they may have life, and life to the full’ (John 10:10), It is difficult and often discouraging because so much is against us. Pope Francis put this difficulty so succinctly: ‘It means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor’. That is a major task... but we have resources in the Church everywhere with which to make a response, not alone but together with others...to make a difference where we are, and where we can.

The full text of Bishop Kevin’s talk is available by emailing oblate_partners@btinternet.com

On decentralisation in the Church

It cannot be presumed that local bishops, like me, have all the answers to problems we face, and while we can for an authentic practice of the Catholic social teaching principle of subsidiarity –what can be done at the lower level, should not be done or blocked by the higher level – this cannot be restricted to devolving some authority and decision-making processes to local bishops. They, too, must also devolve the discernment processes to include the faithful who have the skills and experience to enable the Church response to current issues to be credible, reasonable, and worth thinking about.

Local bishops need to be pastors not authoritarian decision-makers, but rather shepherds who ‘smell like the sheep’ to use Pope Francis’ phrase, shepherds who call forth the whole People of God into a discernment process, based on reading the current ‘signs of the times’, so that we prayerfully discern together what God is calling us as Church to witness to, to advocate for and to be involved in...so that the ‘little ones’ of our world can begin to experience some hope and new beginnings.

On today’s challenge for the Church

Pope Francis calls the Catholic Church to be more ‘missionary’ in the widest and most holistic understanding of the concept. But he warns that, unless we do this, then the alternatives will not be so pleasant. ‘We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in our own comforts... ..such a life is nothing less than a slow suicide.’

Powerful words, yes, but an invitation to walk the path of a more relevant evangelisation, which is faith-filled prayer in the context of our daily experiences, and action for peace, justice and hope in all the communities and situations in which God calls us to share our gifts and ministries... ..we must continue our pilgrimage together so that, wherever we are, Jesus can become incarnate again and people can experience that there can indeed be hope.

Let us become, as Pope Francis calls us to be, a ‘caravan of solidarity’.

Events for 2015

Flame II, 6th – 8th March

Flame II is the largest National Catholic Youth event of 2015, taking place in the Wembley Arena on Saturday 7th March 2015. 10,000 young people will gather for a day of input from inspirational speakers, and world-class music and drama. Come and spend the weekend in London with young people from Oblate parishes throughout the UK and Ireland. (Age: 15-21)

Iona Pilgrimage, 20th – 24th April

A short experience of Celtic Spirituality. Spend 4 nights on the remote island of Iona, rediscovering the ancient Celtic forms of prayer. This is sure to be an incredibly rewarding pilgrim experience. (Age: 17-30)

Canon Law Workshop, 14th – 15th May, Wistaston Hall, Crewe

Join us for our annual Canon Law workshop with Fr. Frank Morrissey OMI.

Missionary Experience, June – July (precise dates to be finalised)

Join our month long annual missionary experience to Zimbabwe. Work in the Sandra Jones Children's Village and experience the Oblate Mission and life in the Zimbabwean bush. Places are very limited on this life-changing trip, so get in touch early for more information. (Applicants must be 18 or older)

Oblate Summer School

- Three Events with Edwina Gateley

1) Walk the Talk, July 18th, Dublin

In the morning Edwina will share her own journey to faith from Africa to the bars and brothels of the inner city. The second part of our day we will explore our call to a renewed and dynamic spirituality inspiring us to believe in our own potential to bring about new life in our broken world.

2) Call to Personal & Global Transformation, July 20th – 23rd Wistaston Hall, Crewe

In the midst of our violent and hurting world we will explore how God as lover and healer ever invites us to new possibilities and to believe in our potential to

make a difference. Through scripture and contemporary stories we will be stretched and challenged to believe in our call to become mystics, saints and prophets. We will laugh, cry and celebrate as we recognise more deeply in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

3) Standing on their Shoulders, July 24th – 26th, Wistaston Hall, Crewe

We will look at some contemporary prophets, mystics and rebels for justice. We will be inspired and affirmed as we listen to stories and poetic readings of the lives of these extraordinary people who have made a difference in our world. Their struggles and passion will inspire and encourage on our own journeys of faith.

Summer Camp, 3rd – 7th August

Once again, young people from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales will come together for 5 days of fun, adventure and community. Test yourself with activities like kayaking, rock-climbing and sea-level traversing, before gathering in the evenings for great workshops and team events. A very popular experience for young people (age 12-14)

Taize Pilgrimage, 1st – 10th August

The Taize community in France, home of Taize music, is a very popular pilgrimage location for teens and young adults, welcoming almost 3 million youth every year. Spend a week living in community with thousands of young people from all over the world, living, playing, praying and singing together. (Age: 15-17)

Lourdes Pilgrimage, 17th – 22nd Sep

Since their first pilgrimage in 1883 the Oblates have been answering the call of Our Lady to come in procession. Today we have groups that depart from Dublin, London and Manchester and we bring over 100 assisted pilgrims who require a special level of care and medical support. We invite you to join us as a pilgrim or helper and share in a journey of faith together.

For further information or to book a place please

contact: Oblate Partners in Mission Office, Denis Hurley House, 14 Quex Road, London NW6 4PL, UK.

Phone: +44 (0)20 7624 7296

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

[Return to Contents Page](#)



printed on paper from
a sustainable source