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# Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.32, 8th October, 2016

In an age of rapid change and confusion we are often challenged to look at the most fundamental questions of all “Why I am here? And who am I?” These questions cannot be answered by politics or economics. These tell us what and how but not why or who. Ultimately, the search for meaning and identity always ends in with an act of faith.

Pilgrimage can be a time for us to stop and reflect on the fundamental questions of life. Speaking during this year’s Oblate pilgrimage to Lourdes, Mossie Lyons shared a slight adaption of the poem ‘Death the Leveller’ by James Shirley.

Sceptre and Crown  
Must tumble down,  
And at the Grotto be equal made  
With the poor crookèd scythe and spade.

This experience of the fundamental equality of all people is something that we see writ large during our

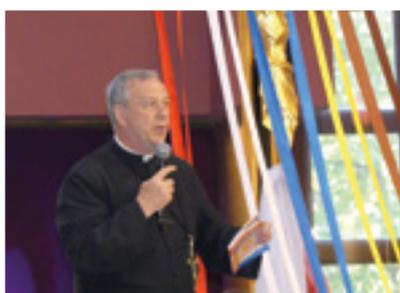
pilgrimage. People travel to Lourdes carrying their own hopes, prayers and burdens. No matter what a person’s background, no matter what their day to day work might be, no matter what their state of health, each person stands in their vulnerability before the Grotto where Mary always points us towards her Son. Having created us in love God knows our fears, he hears our cries and believes in us.

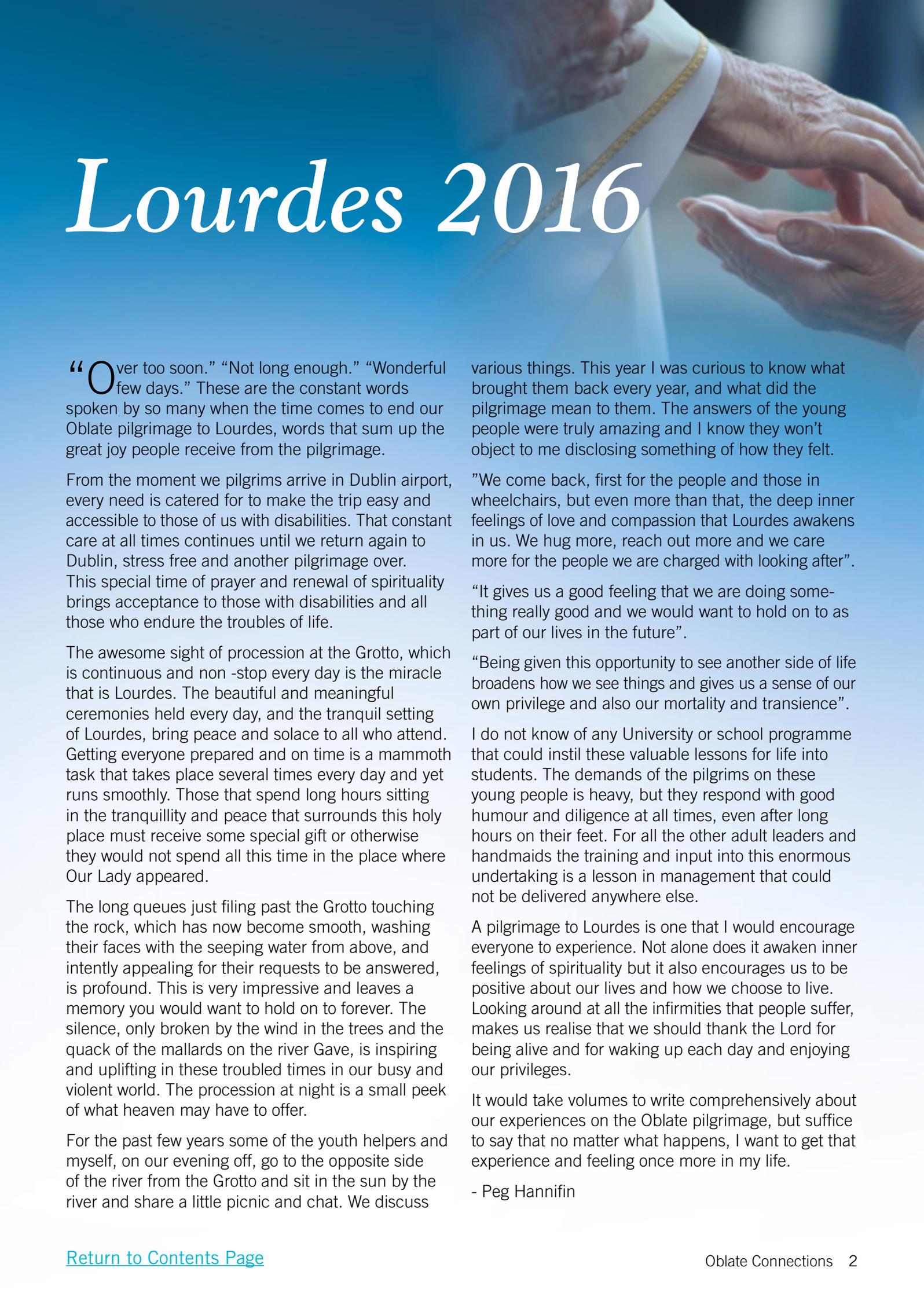
Whether it is in Lourdes or at home we are reminded not be afraid to acknowledge our vulnerability to Jesus, to Mary, to one another. We are invited not to forget our own great capacity to accompany, to support and to heal one another. So as you read the many examples of how God’s love is being made visible in the stories in this issue of Connections, my prayer is that our present lives will be shot through with a future hope, because we trust in a God who is always faithful.

- Fr. Lorcán O’Reilly OMI

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# Lourdes 2016

“Over too soon.” “Not long enough.” “Wonderful few days.” These are the constant words spoken by so many when the time comes to end our Oblate pilgrimage to Lourdes, words that sum up the great joy people receive from the pilgrimage.

From the moment we pilgrims arrive in Dublin airport, every need is catered for to make the trip easy and accessible to those of us with disabilities. That constant care at all times continues until we return again to Dublin, stress free and another pilgrimage over. This special time of prayer and renewal of spirituality brings acceptance to those with disabilities and all those who endure the troubles of life.

The awesome sight of procession at the Grotto, which is continuous and non-stop every day is the miracle that is Lourdes. The beautiful and meaningful ceremonies held every day, and the tranquil setting of Lourdes, bring peace and solace to all who attend. Getting everyone prepared and on time is a mammoth task that takes place several times every day and yet runs smoothly. Those that spend long hours sitting in the tranquillity and peace that surrounds this holy place must receive some special gift or otherwise they would not spend all this time in the place where Our Lady appeared.

The long queues just filing past the Grotto touching the rock, which has now become smooth, washing their faces with the seeping water from above, and intently appealing for their requests to be answered, is profound. This is very impressive and leaves a memory you would want to hold on to forever. The silence, only broken by the wind in the trees and the quack of the mallards on the river Gave, is inspiring and uplifting in these troubled times in our busy and violent world. The procession at night is a small peek of what heaven may have to offer.

For the past few years some of the youth helpers and myself, on our evening off, go to the opposite side of the river from the Grotto and sit in the sun by the river and share a little picnic and chat. We discuss

various things. This year I was curious to know what brought them back every year, and what did the pilgrimage mean to them. The answers of the young people were truly amazing and I know they won't object to me disclosing something of how they felt.

“We come back, first for the people and those in wheelchairs, but even more than that, the deep inner feelings of love and compassion that Lourdes awakens in us. We hug more, reach out more and we care more for the people we are charged with looking after”.

“It gives us a good feeling that we are doing something really good and we would want to hold on to as part of our lives in the future”.

“Being given this opportunity to see another side of life broadens how we see things and gives us a sense of our own privilege and also our mortality and transience”.

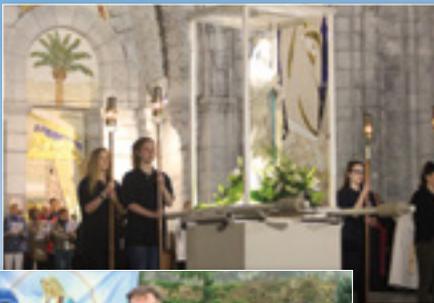
I do not know of any University or school programme that could instil these valuable lessons for life into students. The demands of the pilgrims on these young people is heavy, but they respond with good humour and diligence at all times, even after long hours on their feet. For all the other adult leaders and handmaids the training and input into this enormous undertaking is a lesson in management that could not be delivered anywhere else.

A pilgrimage to Lourdes is one that I would encourage everyone to experience. Not alone does it awaken inner feelings of spirituality but it also encourages us to be positive about our lives and how we choose to live. Looking around at all the infirmities that people suffer, makes us realise that we should thank the Lord for being alive and for waking up each day and enjoying our privileges.

It would take volumes to write comprehensively about our experiences on the Oblate pilgrimage, but suffice to say that no matter what happens, I want to get that experience and feeling once more in my life.

- Peg Hannifin

“Being given this opportunity to see another side of life broadens how we see things and gives us a sense of our own privilege and also our mortality and transience”.



Lourdes is a place of quiet, reconciliation, peace, procession, light, music and small everyday miracles, not to mention the truly miraculous ones. It is a place where many nationalities come together despite their cultural and language differences to petition Our Lady and to worship their God and they do this in many different ways each day, week after week from Easter to the end of October.

This year was my 30th visit and my 26th pilgrimage with the O.M.I.s. to Lourdes. Ever since that first visit in 1991 I have been trying to describe in words the experience and wonder of Lourdes and I came to the conclusion some time ago that words alone simply cannot do it. I never fail to be surprised at how so many people like myself come on pilgrimage and find themselves called back year after year. At how many sick pilgrims return time after time despite what can be for them a long hard journey often fraught with delays, and at the helpers who pay their own fares and accommodation so that they can come to work tirelessly caring for the sick.

It is wonderful to see all the young people who also give up their time to come along and help with the important work of transporting the sick and disabled to and from the Masses, the baths, meals, on excursions into the town and with so many other tasks that benefit from their boundless energy and enthusiasm. Perhaps thinking on these facts alone may give those who have never come on pilgrimage an idea of the amazing experience that is Lourdes but I am convinced that personal participation is the only way to really appreciate it.

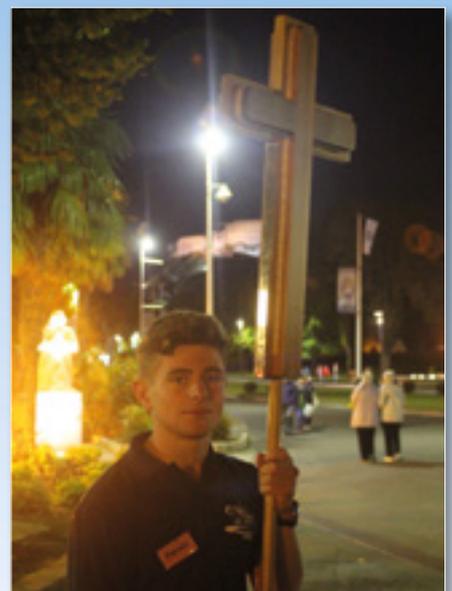
- Deanna Greene

A Pilgrimage is a journey with a difference. The being together, travelling, praying and socially too makes a unique community for the time in Lourdes. Each pilgrim brings with them their individual hopes and prayers. Every pilgrimage is an opportunity to come closer to God, to pray and do penance. And, most importantly, to “come in procession” as requested by Mary. This year to mark the Year of Mercy we had a procession through the Door of Mercy on our first full day together.

I have made several pilgrimages to Lourdes the first being in 1958 as a nurse with the Merseyside Oblate group. On my first visit to the grotto, it was hard to believe that I was standing so close to the place where our Lady had appeared to Bernadette a hundred years before. It is a wonderful place to be. To see the numbers of people praying the rosary and to hear it in so many languages is truly a wonderful experience. I have been to Lourdes several times as a helper since 1958. Once I travelled as a sick pilgrim myself and had to submit to being in a wheelchair which gave me an insight into being both helper and unable. Now, I prefer to hire a scooter and “scoot” around the holy places.

As a disabled pilgrim one has to rely so much on help from others to attend services and visit the special places associated with Bernadette. This help comes mainly from the Oblate Youth Service. The rapport between the young people and their guests really brings out the works of mercy so naturally. Every visit to Lourdes is different each opportunity to walk through the grotto, touch the rock, visit the baths and take part in the processions and the Stations of the Cross brings its own thoughts and memories. Each candle we light for our loved ones and people at home as well as placing their petitions to Our Lady in the grotto brings them all to mind so they too are part of our pilgrimage.

- Marie Stormont





# What does it mean for a young man to take religious vows?

About six years ago I started my novitiate at the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. A new way was opened in front of me. After one year at the end of the novitiate time I was convinced that way would lead me to fullness of life and to happiness. So I decided to take my first vows. And the way became my own way...



I was born 30 years ago in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. At that time there was the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic governed by the Communist Party and closed for the West. The Church and its members were persecuted or at least disadvantaged within the society, but my parents didn't care about it too much so that my siblings and I grew up in a Catholic family that lived actively the faith. Our parents collaborated with a Jesuit priest although the government forbade him any pastoral activity.

I always loved nature, especially the wild animals, so I decided to study biology in Prague. But there was also another passion in me: helping people to find the real happiness in their lives. And this power was continuously increasing in me and I started to pray to God to understand what meaning it had for my life. And so, in the prayer and spiritual direction, I discovered my vocation to religious priesthood. At that time I read some Catholic magazine for youth and I was impressed by the articles about the Oblate missions in Haiti and in North Canada. I desired to become a missionary. So I dared to contact the Oblates... and soon I was staying with them in a community for some time. For the formation I had to go to Germany and later to Italy, where I finished my theology studies last summer.

On the 1st of May 2016, I took the perpetual vows, my perpetual oblation, as we call it. Oblation means sacrifice, offer. We Oblates offer our lives to God like Jesus did; we follow him by living the three evangelical counsels: chastity, poverty and obedience. The first means no sterility but, on the contrary, a type of spiritual fertility, because we are free to love God in the first place and to love others, we are free to serve the people where it is necessary. The evangelical poverty means to have my heart and my treasure with God, to be independent regarding material things, and also to learn solidarity and sharing with the poor. The vow of obedience is for me to say every day "Not my own will, but your will be done, Lord". I can learn it from Jesus who saved the world by his obedience to the Father. I give myself, my will, my talents and my time to God. I make myself available for his plans and I fulfill it by responsibility and obedience to our superior.

Every Christian is called to live these counsels in their evangelical meaning, but we religious are called to do it in a radical and prophetic way. There cannot be any other motivation for such a sacrifice than our love to Jesus Christ and to his Church, especially to the most poor and abandoned. I myself experienced the love of God in my life and I want to give his love further. "Oblating" myself to God I hope and I believe that he will accept me and employ me for his missions, for his salvation of the world.



These were the things I learnt, realized and thought about before taking the perpetual vows. As the moment came and I was lying prostrated on the floor in front of the altar in the chapel of the Oblate General House in Rome, I felt just grace: the grace of my vocation, the grace of the gift of my own family who were present there, and the grace of the whole Oblate family I can belong to. A symbol for that grace was definitely the Oblate cross I received: not a new one, but inherited from Fr. Jan Straka, the last Czech Oblate who faithfully served the people under the hard conditions of the Church controlled by the communist government. I'm very proud that I can wear his cross.

– Karl Mec, OMI





## We are all ministers of the Mercy of God

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



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# “There Ain’t No Mystics Here!”

Fr. Frank Santucci presented this year’s Oblate Summer School on the theme of Spirituality for the 21st Century in Crewe, Edinburgh and London. Here he shares some of the key themes of this year’s event.

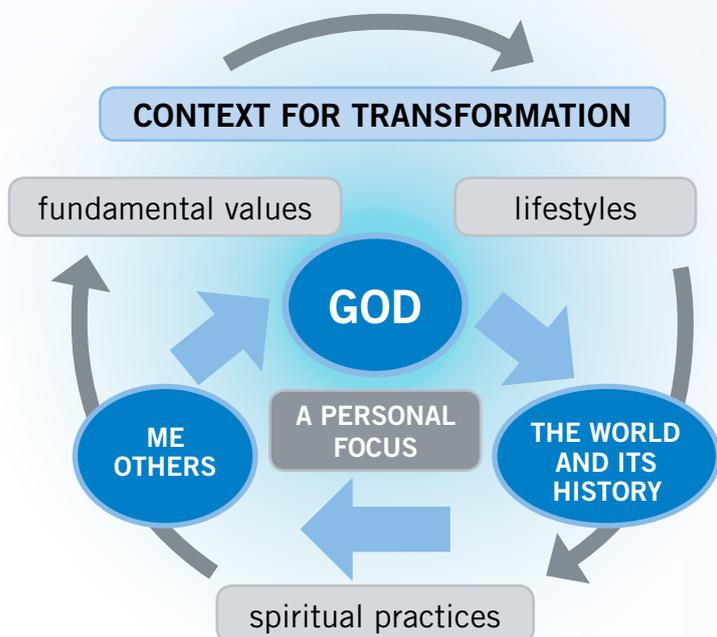
The summer school started off with my receiving a couple of suspicious looks when I asked the question, “Do you have a spirituality?” A few indicated that saints and other holy people have spiritualities, but not normal people in the world! With this began the work of the rest of the week, which hinged around three goals:

## 1 What is Spirituality?

Many people think of spirituality as something esoteric and unattainably up there. By exploring various definitions, we were able to identify some of the foundational components of a description of spirituality. We took as our working definition that of Philip Sheldrake:

“In Christian terms, spirituality refers to the way our fundamental values, lifestyles, and spiritual practices reflect particular understandings of God, human identity, and the material world as the context for human transformation.”

To make it easier I have produced a diagram:



As each of those shapes rotates, it affects the others. My experience and understanding of God, of myself and other people, and of the world and its history finds expression in my lifestyle, in my fundamental values and in my spiritual practices. This is always changing, and thus becomes the context for transformation.

What is important is the “personal focus” in the centre, which differs from person to person, and gives each of us an individual expression of spirituality.

## 2 The major trends in the history of spirituality.

From here we spent time in meeting just a few of the many personalities who inhabit the pages of spirituality – and getting a simple taste of their “personal focus” in their writings. It was like a little taste of different flavours of ice cream, in the hope that each one could identify some attractive “spiritual flavours” to go back to and explore in a deeper way in the future.

The core spiritual values of Jesus started us on our journey, and led us to meet some of the New Testament writers. In exploring martyrdom, we entered the world of Ignatius of Antioch, Felicity and Perpetua, the catacombs and then to the modern times where we have become a Church of Martyrs again. Meeting all the Oblate martyrs concluded that section. The desert fathers and mothers, and Benedict introduced us to monasticism – again very present today in some of its newer expressions like Taizé.



We visited with Francis and Clare, Dominic, Julian of Norwich, Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart, Teresa, John of the Cross, and Brother Lawrence. In contemporary spirituality we joined Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Jean Vanier and others as we looked at spirituality's response to the major challenges of the past 100 years.

### 3 Express a personal spirituality

The aim of the experience was not to concentrate only on academic knowledge, but to allow each participant to explore their own understanding and expression of spirituality. Initially, when I asked how many mystics there were in the room, no one raised their hand. Looking up towards the clouds, someone exclaimed, "There ain't no mystics here!" By the end of the session, each one had been able to claim a spirituality and a down-to-earth mysticism!

#### The Weekend Phase: Spirituality And Mission

We began on Friday evening with the image of open hands and used as our guiding definition: "Spirituality is the story of my life with hands open to God, self and others." Then acknowledging our need for models and spiritual guides we explored how Saint Eugene's story was exactly that of hands wide open to God, others and himself – and in this he was a

missionary as he helped others to open their hands in a similar way.

Saturday was an exploration of the religious experience of several Biblical and historical figures and their expression in open hands. On Sunday we brought the session to a conclusion by working at expressing personal understandings of spirituality. Concluding with a meditation of the spirituality expressed in the first ten Constitutions of our Oblate Rule of Life we shared on how open hands are described and expressed here. When I asked this group how many of them were mystics, they all raised their hands! They had understood that mysticism is nothing more or nothing less than hands open to God, self and others in everyday life.

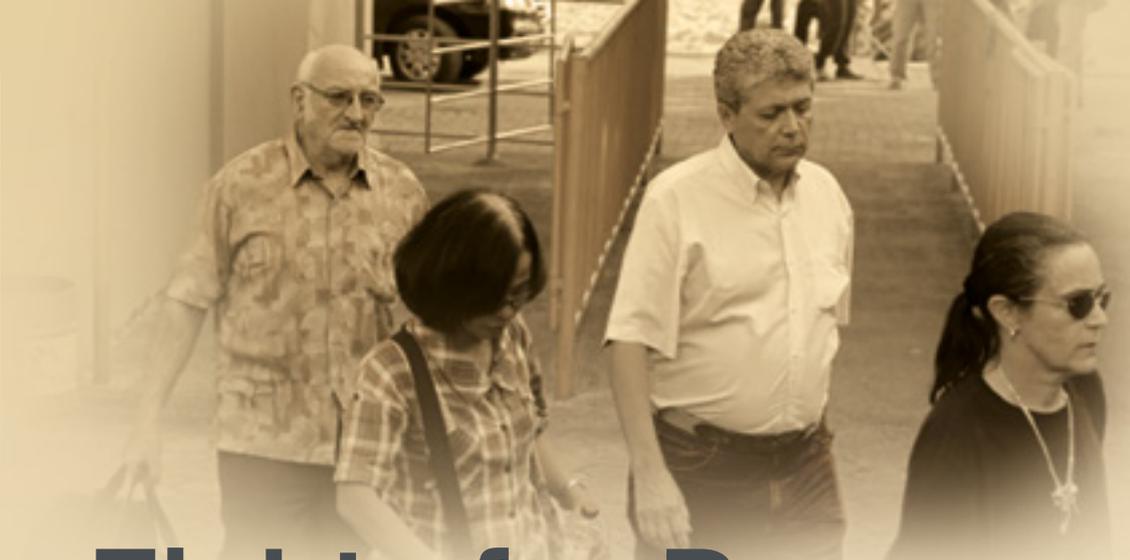
Undoubtedly the one who learnt the most during both sessions was myself. The participants looked at me as some sort of "teacher" – little did they realize that I was the one learning from them and their experiences of God. I was on the holy ground, not of books and academic knowledge, but of God's revelations through the daily lives of fellow pilgrims and searchers. What a privilege and what a gift of God's grace to have been surrounded by so many everyday mystics!

## Oblate Website

### On the new site you will be able to:

- Submit a prayer request
- Find the scripture readings of the day
- There will be a weekly reflection on the scriptures for the upcoming Sunday
- Learn about our upcoming events and make a booking online
- Keep up to date with news from around the Oblate world
- Discover the story of St. Eugene
- Find out how to become a member of the Oblate Congregation
- Get the latest article from Fr. Ron Rolheiser OMI
- Donate to support the work of the Oblate Mission and take out a subscription to the Oblate pools

[www.oblates.co.uk](http://www.oblates.co.uk) | [www.oblates.ie](http://www.oblates.ie)



# Oblate Fights for Poor People and Convicts in Indonesia

The locals in Central Java province's Cilacap Regency know Charles Patrick Burrows, an Oblate priest from Ireland, by another name: Romo Carolus. He landed in Indonesia in 1973 and has stayed on since, working to help alleviate poverty and, relatively recently, offering comfort to inmates on death row at nearby Nusakambangan prison and escorting some as they walked toward the firing lines. Romo Carolus began by counseling Catholic inmates, but provides guidance for other inmates as well. "I'm a Catholic, but I feel honored to counsel people from other religions," Carolus, 73, told Benar News.

He also opposes the death penalty and has campaigned against capital punishment in Indonesia, which still strictly enforces executions of convicted drug offenders, despite widespread criticism from abroad. The priest shared his memory of witnessing the executions in June 2008 of two Nigerians convicted of drug trafficking. "I still remember it clearly when they were released from the ropes tying them up. For a moment, they were groaning before they died," he said.

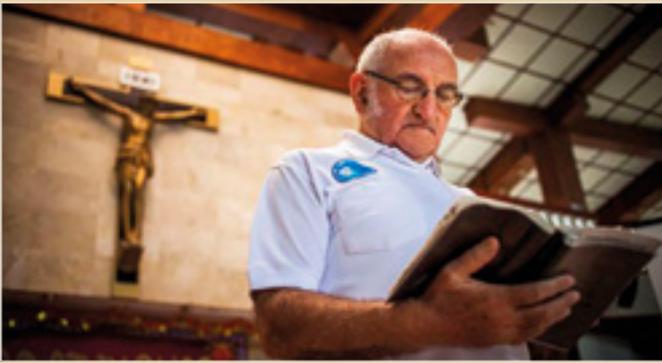
That same year, the priest testified against Indonesia's death penalty law before the Constitutional Court in Jakarta, calling executions by firing squad "torture." Romo Carolus – now an Indonesian citizen – urged the government to consider a more humane way of execution, if capital punishment was inevitable. But officials have not changed the policy and, since then, no religious leader has been allowed to accompany inmates and observe their executions at Nusakambangan, a prison island in Central Java. "We were asked to leave before they were executed," he said.

In late July, Indonesia executed four more drug convicts by firing squad at Nusakambangan, but postponed putting to death 10 others who faced capital punishment. An Indonesian, two Nigerians and a South African were lined up and shot on July 28. While hoping that the government will change the law, Romo Carolus keeps providing counseling to inmates there who are condemned to die. "They can't choose how they die, but at least let them die in dignity," he said.

The universal values that Romo Carolus expresses have left a deep impression on a Muslim cleric and long-time colleague at the prison, Hasan Makarim. "We have known each other for a long time and we are solid working together," Hasan told Benar News.

## Helping to fight poverty

When Carolus, a member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, arrived in Indonesia 43 years ago, he encountered poverty in Cilacap Regency during a visit to Kampung Laut, a fishing village. At the time, the village was known as a home for sympathizers of the banned Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), whose membership and leadership was wiped out during a bloody anti-communist purge in 1965-66.



When he first arrived in Kampung Laut, villagers were suffering from an outbreak of eye infections. He treated them and later initiated efforts to construct a road and bridge in order to open access to the village. It then only had one small road that passed between swamps and sea.

After becoming an Indonesian citizen in 1983, Carolus set up Yayasan Sosial Bina Sejahtera, a nongovernmental organization working to eradicate poverty. The foundation has helped 25 schools – kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school and special-needs – in and around Cilacap. With the love and passion of faith, he taught villagers to empower themselves by preserving fish and planting vegetables in vacant lots to improve their quality of life.

In 2012, Romo Carolus, who was assigned to St. Stephanus parish church in Cilacap, received the Maarif Award from the Maarif Institute for Culture and Humanity for his role as a local figure helping to preserve and observe universal religious values. Cilacap Regent Tatto Suwanto Pamuji said he appreciated the old priest's efforts. "He always visits the neighborhoods and listens to the public complaints by himself," Tatto said.

### Do good unto others

Carolus stresses the importance of education as the only way to reduce poverty and ignorance. God provides people with everything as long as they want to give their best, he said, adding that all people are meant to live on their own without waiting for others' help. Whenever there is a chance, no matter how small, he advised everyone to show good will toward others. "Even when death is coming to you and you still have time to plant a tree, then plant it. Show generosity in every chance, even the tiniest one," he said.

- Kusumasari Ayuningtyas  
Originally Published by the Benar News

## Subscribe to the Oblate Pools and Support the Oblate Missions

### Weekly prizes of €300 and €150

For the past 40 years the Oblate Pools has been raising funds for the Oblate Missions overseas. The subscription for the year is €36/£30. Each subscriber receives a unique code and every Saturday the draw for the winners takes place. The winners are picked based on the results of Football matches in winter and of race meetings throughout the summer. To purchase an annual subscription please email Barbara Hogan at: [mamioblate@eircom.net](mailto:mamioblate@eircom.net) or write to The Mission Office, House of Retreat, Tyrconnell Road, Inchicore, Dublin 8, Ireland.

**You can also subscribe online: [www.oblates.ie](http://www.oblates.ie)**  
**All proceeds from the Oblate Pools is used to support the work of the Oblate Mission throughout the world.**

# World Youth Day 2016



The Polish Oblates welcomed over 1500 people into their parish, including us! There were a variety of countries represented, from Canada to Turkmenistan. In our group alone we had four countries represented: Ireland, England, Scotland and the USA...

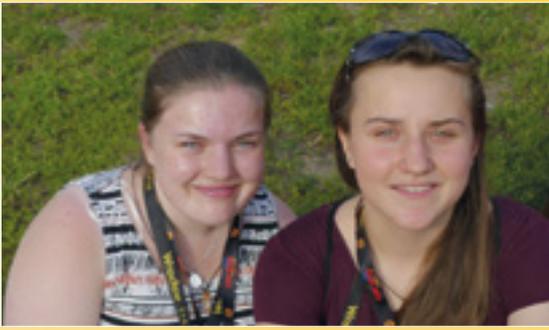
There was such an amazing atmosphere from the second we arrived in Wrocław. In the week we listened to talks given by the Superior General, Fr Louis Logan and the Provincial of Poland along with our own Fr Raymond Warren. Through the talks we learned about the charism of the Oblates and St Eugene

The opening ceremony allowed us to come together as one family and gather for one thing, to worship. The Oblates are a very youth centered religious order and we listened to Fr Rois Alonso Luis Ignacio about St Eugene and Youth History of Mutual Evangelism. Fr Rois gave us the time to reflect on what God has done in our lives and how we could use this close connection with him to bring the Gospel to those who were less fortunate as St Eugene did.

As well as catechesis we took part in many other things including a football match. Our own John Roe captained the Rest of the World Team Vs The Oblates. We also attended and took part in the festival of nations on the second night.



The opening ceremony allowed us to come together as one family and gather for one thing, to worship.



*“Spending time with the Oblates in Wroclaw reaffirmed that the human support within our faith is far more reaching that I often acknowledge”.*



*“The Festival of Nations was pretty cool, you got to see each country at its finest. For example Canada had a rap song that showed what was going on in Canada and Spain did an interactive dance which really helped people get in the mood for WYD”.*  
– Beata Korba, Scotland.

The OMI WYD in Wroclaw struck the balance between worshipping and having fun. This was portrayed throughout all of the events we attended.

*“Spending time with the Oblates in Wroclaw reaffirmed that the human support within our faith is far more reaching that I often acknowledge. Being reminded of that was beautiful and empowering”.*  
– Jassy DeMetz, USA.



It was sad to say goodbye to Wroclaw and all the people who had made it what it was. Before we all made our departures we stopped off at a little town called Malnia, the birthplace of Blessed Father Józef Cebula. Here we celebrated our final mass together as the Oblate family. The whole town came together to welcome us and provide us with cake and tea. The atmosphere was bulging with joy and happiness, which really set us up for WYD in Kraków.

– Stephanie Lee, Edinburgh, Scotland



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# *The Friends of St Eugene Rucksack Appeal*

During this summer, the Friends of St Eugene in Tower Hill, London were inspired by the efforts of other groups from the Friends of St Eugene to try an appeal for items that homeless people can carry about with them that will help support their physical health and well being.

We made some enquiries about what might be helpful if we did a ruck sack appeal. The homeless day centre at St Botolphs church closed in 2008 and was taken over by Providence Row (Christian charity).

The local homeless day centre run by them is called the Dellow Centre. This is connected to a hostel for homeless people, located above the centre. Many homeless people drop in to the day centre daily, and it is particularly busy in the mornings. The centre seems to form a focus for many of the local homeless and for homeless traveling through the area, who find out about the centre from local people and agencies like the police and health agencies.

We met with some staff and spoke with some of the service users at the day centre. The staff and homeless people we met were friendly and made us feel very welcome. The staff were enthusiastic about our suggested rucksack appeal. They were low on supplies to offer service users, and they have been somewhat overwhelmed this year by increasing numbers of people needing help, using the shower facilities, looking for a meal and seeking some company. They suggested the following items would be very welcome, including shower gels, shampoo and conditioners, moisturisers, tooth brushes, tooth paste, baby wipes, deodorants, disposal razors, sanitary towels, T-shirts, underwear and socks.

Our group discussed the benefits and practicalities of launching an appeal. We decided to run the appeal for 5 weeks to see the level of response and comments from the community that attends our parish church of English Martyrs. We were keen to provide an opportunity for the parish community to contribute without exhausting the people's generosity and ability to give. The response to the appeal was surprising. People seemed to be genuinely moved by the homeless and having an opportunity to offer support.

In our FoSE group, we have often talked about frustrations with how to support people we see locally and daily on the street begging. Addictions and mental illness are common reasons for becoming homeless. Of course, it's a complicated matter, and we were concerned about donated monies being used for alcohol and drugs, and we didn't want to encourage an addiction lifestyle. In common, we had felt helpless about how to support our neighbours who are homeless. Some of the group had bought food when they have had the time to do this, and offered some friendly conversation. However, this still felt unsatisfactory.

The community that attend English Martyrs church at Tower Hill is made up of a core of local people and a migrant group of travellers and tourists. The area around Tower Hill has been populated over the last decade with many hotels. Various stories emerged



of people's responses to the appeal. A tourist gave £10 and said he'd struggled to know how to help the homeless he'd seen and was grateful for this focused response. In all we collected £30 cash. Another traveller was so moved on seeing the appeal, left the church before Mass, and returned from the local supermarket with a shopping bag of supplies for the appeal.

It was clear that people really wanted to help the homeless and this appeal gave both the local and migrant groups that make up our parish community an opportunity to help and they gave generously.

We delivered the collected items and monies to Nadine; fund raiser at the Dellow centre. She was also surprised at the response, and very grateful for the much needed items. She has offered to meet up with our group so that we can explore further opportunities to support the local homeless people. We are likely to run this appeal again next year. The appeal ran alongside our on-going food bank appeal and attention raised by the rucksack appeal also helped to boost food bank appeal contributions.

- Martin Ford, FoSE Tower Hill, London

## *Wistaston Hall Events*

### **Advent Day Retreat**

**December 6th & 7th, 2016**

The coming of God into our world, the Feast of Christmas, expresses, at its deepest level, the incredible love of God for us... and yet, amid the hype and energy of Christmas, we so easily lose sight of the miracle which is Christmas. These Day Retreats are ideally suited for groups or individuals who wish to stop for a few moments, to step outside their busy schedules, to rest, be at peace and reflect in a gentle and prayerful way on the Glory of Christmas. The Retreat will include a reflective input, Eucharist, quiet times of reflection and, for those who wish it, an opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

### **Advent Weekend Retreat**

**Friday Dec 9th - Sunday Dec 11th, 2016**

An opportunity to prepare for the great Feast of Christmas, to bring our focus to what is at the heart of Christmas, the birth of a child in Bethlehem and the amazing wonder of a God who loves us so much more than we can ever understand. This Retreat will include some reflective inputs, Eucharist, moments of prayer and periods for quiet and gentle reflection. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can also be celebrated with anyone who wishes to truly "come home" to God this Christmas.

### **Advent Mid Week Retreat**

**Monday Dec 12th - Wednesday Dec 14th, 2016**

An opportunity to prepare for the great Feast of Christmas, to bring our focus to what is at the heart of Christmas, the birth of a child in Bethlehem and the amazing wonder of a God who loves us so much more than we can ever understand. This Retreat will include some reflective inputs, Eucharist, moments of prayer and periods for quiet and gentle reflection. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can also be celebrated with anyone who wishes to truly "come home" to God this Christmas.

**For information on these and our other events please contact the Oblate Team at:**

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89 Broughton Lane, Crewe, Cheshire, CW2 8JS

**Tel:** +44 (0) 1270 568 653 or

**E-mail:** [director@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk](mailto:director@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk)  
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# Ten Commandments of Mercy – Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Among the Ten Commandments, one begins with the word “remember”: Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day”. It reminds us to recall something we already know. There are commandments of mercy written into our very DNA. We already know them, but we need to remember them more explicitly. What are they?

## **The Ten Commandments of Mercy:**

### **1. Remember that mercy lies deepest in God’s heart**

Few things so much approximate the essence of God as does mercy. Mercy is God’s essence. Scripture uses words such as loving-kindness and compassion to try to define what constitutes God’s mercy, but the central biblical concept, captured in the Hebrew concept of *hesed*, connotes a relationship that loves, embraces, and forgives even when, and especially when, we cannot measure up or deserve what’s given us.

### **2. Remember that mercy is the essence of all true religion**

Inside religion and spirituality, within all faiths, three things try to lay claim to what’s central: proper religious practice, outreach to the poor, and compassion. Ultimately they are not in opposition, but complementary pieces of one religious whole. But for religious practice and outreach to the poor to be an extension of God’s love and not of human ego, they need to be predicated upon compassion, mercy. Deepest inside of every religion is the invitation: Be compassionate, merciful, as God is compassionate.

### **3. Remember that we all stand forever in need of mercy**

There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who converts than over ninety-nine righteous persons. Does God love sinners more than the righteous? There are no righteous persons. It’s rather that we feel God’s love more when we admit that we’re sinners. None of us ever measure up. But, as St. Paul so consolingly teaches, the whole point is that we don’t have to measure up. That’s what mercy means. It’s undeserved, by definition.

### **4. Remember that, having received mercy, we must show mercy to others**

We only receive and appropriate God’s mercy and the mercy of others when we extend that same mercy to others. Mercy has to flow through us. If we don’t extend it to others we become self-indulgent and too harsh on others.

### **5. Remember that only the practice of mercy sets us free**

Receiving and giving mercy is the only thing that frees from our congenital propensity to self-seek, self-justify, and judge others. Nothing frees us more from the tyranny of ego than does the practice of mercy.

### **6. Remember that mercy is not opposed to justice, but is its fulfillment.**

Mercy, as Walter Kasper so aptly puts it, is not “a kind of fabric softener that undermines the dogmas and commandments and abrogates the central and fundamental meaning of truth.” That’s the accusation the Pharisees made against Jesus. Mercy is where justice is meant to terminate.

### **7. Remember that only the practice of mercy will make God’s Kingdom come**

Jesus promised us that someday the meek will inherit the earth, the poor will eat plentiful, rich food, and all tears will be wiped away. That can only happen when mercy replaces self-interest.

### **8. Remember that mercy needs too to be practiced collectively**

It is not enough for us to be merciful in our own lives. Mercy is marginalized in a society that doesn’t sufficiently attend to those who are weak or needy, just as it is marginalized in a church that is judgmental. We must create a society that is merciful and a church that is merciful. Mercy, alone, enables the survival of the weakest.

### **9. Remember that mercy calls us to do works both spiritual and physical**

Our Christian faith challenges us to perform mercy in a double way, corporeally and spiritually. The classic corporal works of mercy are: Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. The classic spiritual works of mercy are: instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the afflicted, admonish the sinner, forgive offenses, bear wrongs patiently, and pray for the living and the dead. God has given us different gifts and all of us are better at some of these than at others, but mercy is manifest in all of them.

### **10. Remember that our lives are a dialogue between God’s mercy and our weaknesses**

The only thing at which we are adequate is being inadequate. We are forever falling short at something, no matter the strength of our sincerity, good intention, and willpower. Only mercy, receiving it and giving it, can lead us out of the choppy waters of our own anxieties, worry, and joylessness. Only in knowing mercy do we know gratitude.

This year, 2016, Pope Francis has asked us all to live a year of mercy, to contemplate the mystery of mercy “as a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.” Mercy, he believes, is the secret to putting a credible face to God, to putting a credible face to our churches, and to walking with steadiness inside our own lives.

