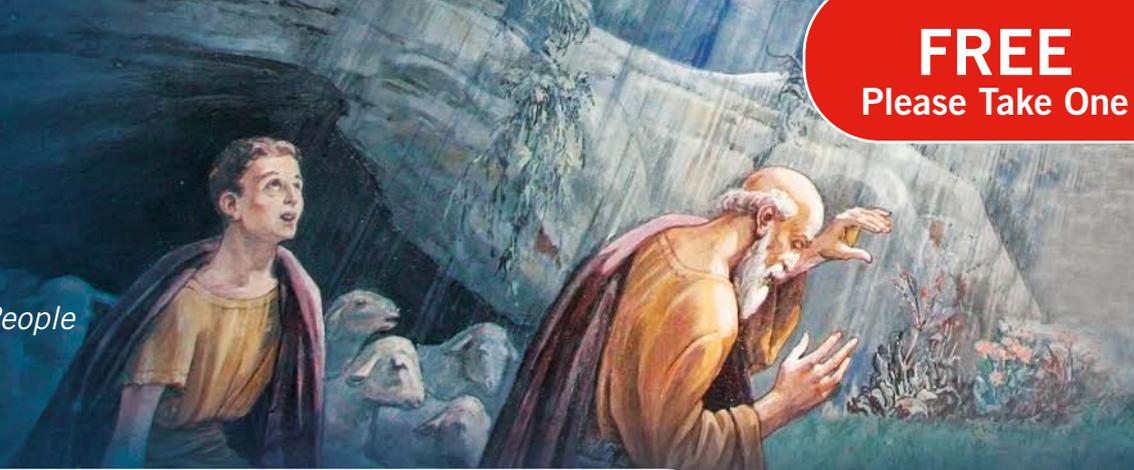




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Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.49, 8th December, 2020

During these days the Spiritual calendar is full. We began the season of Advent on the 29th of November. We marked the 25th anniversary of the canonisation of Eugene de Mazenod on the 3rd of December and we celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception on the 8th of December. All of this happens in a context that we could not have imagined this time last year. New thinking, new ways of doing things are demanded from us.

We, with all humanity are like the people of Israel who left Egypt only to find themselves wandering for forty years in the desert. The world is caught in a very unusual moment of time. We have been stopped in our tracks, forced to stand still with all our plans on hold. Now is the time for all of us to take stock. We need to reassess what is important, what we need to let go of and how are we going to take greater care of one another and our world in the days to come.

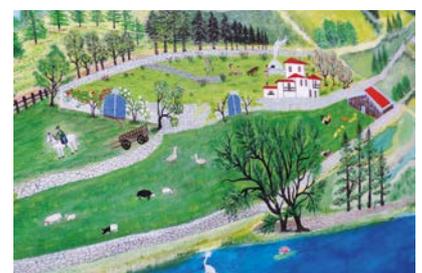
St. Eugene was described on the day of his canonisation as a man of Advent. In our hour of history, we are asked to live the same Mission of St. Eugene; that is, to bring Good News to the Poor. In the present context we are all poor. We are invited to wait for and to meet again the person of Christ. In this way we experience again his Good News for us and so are called to share that Good News with others.

The first reading on the First Sunday of Advent includes the prayer of Isaiah “Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down!” That prayer was answered with the birth of the child Jesus in Bethlehem. As we journey towards Christmas we join with the prayer of all humanity for the hand of God to guide us through these desert times to be “God with us, Emmanuel”

– Fr. Oliver Barry, OMI, Provincial

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Christmas – its Chequered and its Chequered Sequence

– Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI

If someone who had never heard the story of Jesus were to ask any of us about his origins, we would, I suspect, begin with the story of his annunciation and birth and end with the story of his resurrection and ascension. While that does capture his life, that's not how the Gospels either begin or end his story. The story of Jesus and the meaning of Christmas can only really be understood by looking at where Jesus came from, his family tree, and by looking at how his story has continued in history. Indeed, that's how the Gospels tell his story.

The Gospel of John begins his story by pointing out his eternal origins inside of God before his birth. For John, Jesus' family tree has just three members, the Trinity: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Mark's Gospel gives no family tree, begins his story with his public ministry, and then has no ending to his story. For Mark, Jesus' story is still ongoing. Matthew and Luke, however, include inside Jesus' story a long family tree, a genealogy, that shows his origins. Too often we tend to ignore these genealogies with their long list of difficult-to-pronounce names, most of which mean little to us. But, as the renowned biblical scholar, Raymond Brown, emphasizes again and again, we cannot really understand the story of Jesus without understanding why his family tree, this long list of names, is judged to be important.

What's to be learned from looking at Jesus' family tree, that curious list of ancient names? Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah, Judah fathered Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez fathered Hezon, Hezon fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminabab... and so on. Among other things, these genealogies trace out Jesus' origins in a way that tells us that his real story will not be grasped by anyone who wants to believe that Jesus' human origins were totally

“God's grace works, even through people like us and churches like ours, revealing divinity despite most everything.”

immaculate and pure, containing no sin or weakness. Jesus wasn't born of all saintly ancestors. Rather, as the genealogies show, his family tree contains as many sinners as saints. Among his ancestors were liars, adulterers, murderers, power-grabbing men, scheming women, wicked kings, corrupt church officials, and sinners of every sort. The same holds true for the religious institutions that figured in his birth. The religious history of Judaism out of which Jesus was born was too a *mélange* of grace and sin, of religious institutions serving both God and their own human interests.

And what's the moral in all this? The lesson is this: Both the persons and the institutions that gave birth to Jesus were mixture of grace and sin, a mixture that mediated God's favor and also rationalized it for its own benefit. But, out of that *mélange*, Jesus was born. It can be a scandal to the piety within us to accept that not everything that gave birth to Christmas was immaculately conceived. The same holds true of what followed after Jesus' birth. His earthly ministry was also partially shaped and furthered by

Origins



the self-interest of the religious authorities of his time, the resistance of secular powers of his time, and the fear and infidelity of his own disciples. And this has continued through the two thousand years of history since. Jesus has continued to have earthly incarnation throughout the centuries thanks not only to saintly individuals and virtuous churches. No, Jesus' family tree subsequent to his birth is also a long list of saints and sinners, of selfless martyrs and selfish schemers, of virtue and betrayal.

And recognizing and accepting this should not lead us to a cynicism where we begin to doubt the truth of Jesus or the legitimacy of the church because of the lies, sin, infidelity, and not-infrequent stupidity of those human persons and religious institutions who originally made up Jesus' family-tree and who have constituted his family since. Faith can accommodate the recognition of sin and infidelity. So can Christmas.

Christmas has a chequered origin and a chequered sequence: Jacob did steal his brother's birthright; Judah did sleep with his daughter-in-law; David did commit adultery and did commit murder to cover it up; the church did set up the Inquisition and kill more of its own than were martyred in the early church; the church did give us popes who sold ecclesial favors and were sexually licentious; the churches, despite their catholicity and holiness, have perennially been narrow and elitist and never been fully free of self-interest; and the sexual abuse scandal did happen.

But the pure mystery of Jesus, of Christ, and of the Church somehow shine through in spite of all of this and, ironically, because of all of this. Like a hidden seed, God's grace works, even through people like us and churches like ours, revealing divinity despite most everything. And the God who wrote the original Christmas with crooked lines also writes the sequence with crooked lines, and some of those lines are our own lives.



Something New to Enjoy – An Oasis in The City

Located in such a very built-up part of London, the Oblate Retreat and Spirituality centre, Tower Hill, known as De Mazenod House offers an oasis of quiet and peace to anyone seeking respite from their busy lives. Unfortunately there is no garden space, no trees or shrubs to bring a touch of nature to the surroundings.

However, there is one small courtyard enclosed by the high walls of the Church and surrounding hotel. There in that once forlorn space, a magnificent scene of nature and creation has emerged and it has become a place of contemplation and peace. This painting measuring 5m x 3.5m is titled 'Laudato Si', a reference to Pope Francis' great encyclical on the care of our Common home.

There couldn't possibly be a more suitable title than 'Laudato Si' to name this recent completed work of art. As a matter of fact, this title stems from Saint Francis of Assisi's canticle 'Laudato Si', where we are reminded that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life, and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.

These beautiful words sum up indeed the theme of this reverie, which depicts a harmonious abode that serves as a bridge among all living creatures. Of course, this environment is our precious home, and it is our task to keep this harmony alive. This work does not only celebrate nature and life, but also resonates with deep meanings. Here, I ask the viewer to direct your attention inward, in a contemplative way to explore the spiritual and the temporal, and the relationship between them, in a thought-provoking way.

Originally, the idea was to simply sketch a scene from the lake district, but over time and during the long period of lockdown with the freedom to experiment, new ideas emerged replacing what was initially conceived.

In simplest terms, art can often have a positive factor, if not a stimulus in our development and consciousness. Hence, I envisaged a sprawling space to draw on imagery as well as allegories to instigate a new realm of the viewer's imagination.

Practically everyone feels connected to a place of nostalgic or sweet memories of some happy time in the past to which one returns in one's mind, picking particular moments to cherish. And this, in fact served as the objective when I embarked on painting such a large and unusual canvas. In a way, this rural setting crafted some of the imagery, a symbolism of an idyll home that can be revisited whenever one feels the urge to, even virtually.

At first, the project seemed daunting, too immense and inconceivable for any artistic work to fully capture or express. Yet, in a providential masterstroke, the work went underway and the rest is history. I experimented with the perspective, angles variation and explored a myriad of colours and hues. Then each day, I would take photos and reflect on the overall scene as well as on ways to improve or discard things.

In summary, capturing an ordinary scene from life around us made me realise and discover new aspects about myself and my relationship with nature and others. In fact, behind these elliptical explorations of unspoiled nature, a new canvas was radically offered unlike our modern landscape of busy schedules, dilemmas and never-ending doubts, fear and worries.

Only a few people saw the work in situ prior to or just upon completion; I was able to see their reaction and listen to their riveting interpretation. To my surprise, the composite story that I interweaved on this wall transported those individuals to a place they had a bond with, whether the hills of Kashmir, the stone walls of the west of Ireland, the Bavarian valleys, the Czech countryside and even a coffee farm high up in the Colombian mountains.

The question now, is where do you see yourself in this painting?

– Chaher Rhomaei





“Who will you connect with this Christmas to ensure no one is travelling alone”

Lifting Loneliness this Christmas and Beyond

I live across the street from Good Shepherd Women’s Centre, a shelter for women and children who are homeless because of violence and poverty. Each year at this time, the traffic on our narrow street increases exponentially as gifts of food and toys are delivered, with an expectation of holiday merriment accompanying them. December 24 arrives, and the street empties, year in, year out. (There is often a small resurrection of this traffic at Easter, pun intended.)

What about this year? The pandemic giveth and the pandemic taketh away. In the giving column, busy people have been gifted with the very element they incessantly complain is missing from their lives, the gift of time. Unlike other Christmases where our loved ones try to give us more time by wrapping yet another ‘time-saving’ waffle maker, bread baker, or cheese grater, for non-health care workers, this Christmas will be filled to overflowing with time.

The trick here will be not to fill the minutes and hours that come with this gift by trying to re-create the things that were. Instead, take the time as it is and let it tick away into the future without a plan, unfolding in ways those of us who live by an agenda will find uncomfortable at first.

In the ‘pandemic taketh’ column, is a big check mark beside communal gatherings. Social services that usually feed hundreds of people a turkey dinner at this time of year and hand out all the donated gifts, have had to rethink their connection to the people they want to serve. Households are being asked to celebrate amongst themselves and keep it small. In some jurisdictions, people who live alone are allowed to co-mingle with one other family in an effort to limit the experience of isolation with which this pandemic has also ‘gifted’ us.

Social isolation is a greater health threat than obesity and studies have shown the experience of loneliness is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Greater social connections can reduce the risk of an early death by up to 50%. The U.K. is unique in its appointment of a Minister of Loneliness in 2018, and a Loneliness Strategy currently being implemented.

Jesus makes it clear we are to be about lifting the isolation and loneliness of others, praising the people who saw Him as a stranger, as someone as sick or in prison, and being present for them. How can we be present now?

If you live in an area where people alone can be part of your social bubble, be sure to set an extra place setting six feet apart and fill the chair with an acquaintance or stranger from your neighbourhood. Contact your parish or a local service agency for possible connections.

Perhaps some old-fashioned innovation is needed in the form of connecting to people through the post box. For example, an elementary student from Putney, Wandsworth, started Community Senior Letters, connecting letter writers to seniors in care homes. That effort, led by a 16-year old, now has people in Wandsworth, Richmond, Kingston-upon-Thames, Merton, Camden, Islington, Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea, London as well as Edinburgh, Scotland, breaking down the barriers of isolation. (Contact communityseniorletters@gmail.com for more info)

So, this is Christmas. The Holy Family travelled together. The Magi travelled together. The Shepherds travelled together. Who will you connect with this Christmas to ensure no one is travelling alone on their journey, now and throughout the year?

– Deirdre Pike



A Shared Mission

We have invited members of the Darndale-Belcamp Faith Community to reflect on their experience of living their faith during the recent lockdown experience as we continue to live with the impact of Covid19.

Fr. Eduardo Núñez-Yepes OMI

When I think of the mission in Our Lady Immaculate Faith Community (Darndale/Belcamp), what comes to my mind and heart are names, faces, goodness, resilience, generosity, and faith. During these difficult times, we decided not to give up. This is a Faith Community that stands firm in hope and in the assurance that the Lord always provides.

The same Holy Spirit that moved Jesus to make real the Kingdom of God here and now continues moving the hearts of so many people in our community. In the middle of uncertainty and pain, the Spirit has inspired us to respond in new ways: for new challenges, new answers.

This is a shared mission. We are called to work together, dream together, and make real the life of the Kingdom of God together here and now.

Fr. Michael O'Connor OMI - LOCK DOWN

Darndale Belcamp is under the flight path of Dublin Airport, about three miles from the runway. When the 'Lock Down' came there was a great silence interrupted by the grinding, eerie sound of the Aer Lingus plane leaving or landing from China bearing medical equipment for the Health Service. The trees, plants and all the world of nature were beginning to emerge during this quiet time. In the midst of this isolation different groups began to emerge and get down to the task of looking out for, caring and visiting people in this time of the 'new normal'.



Fr. Michael O'Connor OMI

The agencies of care in the Darndale Belcamp Village Centre, New Life Centre and Parish Centre, Golden Years, Meals on Wheels, Society of St Vincent de Paul, Crosscare and sports groups took on the challenge in a creative way.

The local schools in the parish worked through the summer to reach out to their pupils in a new way.

A few lines came to me:

- 1) When [i] what I do and [ii] what I have is taken from me – who am I?
- 2) “Go and sit in your cell and your cell will tell you everything”

These days can be a time to notice how fragile we are and how fragile the planet is.

How interconnected we all are – the web is tender.

- 3) A kind word and small gestures can lift the isolation and weariness which comes from the question how long is it going to last “The Kingdom of God is very near to us” [Luke 10:9]

A Prayer

“In the morning let me know your love” [Psalm 90]
A lament for what and who we have lost [Psalm 137]
– “By the rivers of Babylon...”



Olivia Smith (NLC)

Hilda McLoughlin

Olivia Smith (NLC)

The New Life Centre is a busy place with all the comings and goings, with fun and laughter, where the lonely could come for tea or coffee, a scone and a chat. Then March and Covid-19 came and staff were sent home and everything stopped, doors were closed, gates were locked and only a very few staff remained to keep the place ticking over. It all became so, so quiet.

Then hope in July when the children returned in smaller numbers, even if it was for a smaller version of our Summer Camp which brought back some of the fun and laughter again, we all have to hope for better days to come. Hope tells us to hold on in anticipation and expectation – because something good is just ahead!

Hilda McLoughlin

My name is Hilda. Our Lady Immaculate Church has been part of my life for the past 40 years and I have been the Sacristan there for the last 14 years. But for all these years this one has been the hardest with the arrival of Covid-19.

I feel lost because of the closing of the church, with the missing of mass, with not being able to watch babies being baptised, little girls and boys making their First Holy Communion, the joy of weddings and the sadness of funerals celebrated with the support of family and friends. I pray that it will come to an end soon and all families can get together with their loved ones again, with the help of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother.

Lisa Fagan (NLC)

Our community and Centre went from a hive of activity to silence in a day in March. Our school playgrounds fell silent and our students and tutors from our educational support programme and the stories they would regale us with, on a daily basis, were all gone.

But amidst the uncertainties and lockdowns the New Life Centre and our Church of Our Lady Immaculate has transformed in how it provides its services to online help, with the aid of digital technology, to help to our students, and online prayer services to the community to provide support in a time when we were forced to be socially distanced. At this time our Centre and Church are providing hope and friendship in the services it is providing to the community, in its selfless work of charity such as Crosscare and the food bank, counselling and childcare facilities for essential workers during these trying times.



Lisa Fagan (NCL)



Maeve Canavan (Voluntary Worker NLC)

During this time of Covid-19 and each or both of the lockdowns we have experienced since, I have been very struck by the change we have experienced and in many ways how quiet our lives have become:

As some of us are away from work, there are fewer deadlines – we no longer need to be in work by this time... As we cannot meet up with friends and family (outside our ‘bubble’) – we miss the ‘chat’ over a cuppa... As our churches are no longer open for mass – we miss the opportunity to celebrate together even as our numbers grow smaller over the years... I am struck very much by the silence, the lack of people about as the long winter evenings approach, the lack of evening classes and even though the church in Darndale is open for private prayer every day, the numbers are few and the church has become very silent.

Maybe this is a time to reflect on the peace – “Be still, and know that I am God” [Psalm 46:10], before the hustle and bustle and busy time of Christmas shopping and running around return (hopefully!) and we will miss the quiet times.

In some aspects I have been taken by how quickly some people have adjusted to the ‘new normal’ by attending mass digitally or adding condolences to an RIP notice. But there are always examples of people and services that are particularly needed and still under pressure. We operate a food bank in Darndale in conjunction with Crosscare and the St Vincent de Paul every week, and the numbers have been increasing steadily all the way through from the first lockdown in March. People are struggling both financially and socially and for some, things will never be the same. For others these lockdowns will take a long time to recover from.

But recovery is on the way, because we live in hope – hope of an end to lockdown for good, hope of a vaccine, hope of a Christmas that we can share with family, hope of a return to ‘normal’ with the advent of the New Year, hope that our Centre will have the people return for a cuppa and a chat and the usual suspects ‘just dropping in’, hope that our churches will return to ministry and hope that we will all learn from the experience of the last year, of how to appreciate the everyday, that we never thought we’d miss so much...



Sister Luamy Thomas FMM

God has been the heart and centre of my experience. My struggles and challenges became my strengths and grace-filled experiences.

In the middle of this journey of hope and mission in Darndale, came the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown, and restrictions. Everything seems to come to a standstill. However, it is not the end and things have not fallen apart. We now must change the way we do things. We must be creative in the way we connect and reach out to each other. The use of technology has taken a new meaning in our pastoral ministry and how we worship.

Life goes on with renewed hope and in the midst, I have experienced the resilience, solidarity, and compassion of the people, especially those I know in Darndale. Again, our challenges and struggles can be grace-filled experiences if we are open to Grace among us.

We realize that ‘this too will pass.’ The sunset of these troubled times will be here and the dawn of a new day will come soon when we will be able to meet each other again, and we live in hope knowing God will never abandon His people.





Looking Forward to 2021 at Wistaston Hall, Crewe

As we come up to Christmas progress is well underway on the repairs to the Hall after the fire in August. The electricians have begun the huge task of replacing the wiring and restoring power back to the Centre. Even though the hall looks like a building site at the moment, it is good to know we are moving towards the restoration of the centre and being able to open up once again. As well as the repairs, there are also plans for a lift in the new wing to give people more accessibility to the rooms on the first floor. There will be many exciting changes for people to discover when we are able to re-open.

The Grange and Francis Morrissey OMI building are also beginning to take shape, ready to open next year.

The solar panels are on the roof and combined with the new heating system it will mean the building will be self-sufficient, which is part of our commitment to a sustainable environment. The original plan for the art room was halted when it turned out the entire building had to be torn down and rebuilt, that is now on the way to happening and the new foundations have just been completed.

There is a lot to look forward to in the coming year for all at Wistaston Hall. New buildings, new features and a new programme will bring lots of excitement into 2021.

– Rachel Challoner

A Weekend for People in Recovery

12th – 14th March 2021 £150.00 per person
Led by Mossie Lyons

A way of living life to the full. (Jn 10. 10)
A life of conscious connection to God, others, and self. We will explore, reflect, share, and celebrate conscious sobriety. The retreat will draw from the rich sources of the scriptures, from AA and Christian spirituality. Sober living is an invitation to all of us. All are welcome.

Embracing Trust with a Woman’s Heart

14th – 16th May 2021 £150.00 per person
Led by Sister Kathleen Bryant

Retreat for Women Weekend
So many things are coming at us, so much expected of us, where is God’s invitation in all of this frenzy? God invites us to embrace trust, not just to make an act of trust. As women, God invites us to trust in the deepest reality, that we are loved beyond imagination and to trust God at work in our spiritual hungers and longings. This workshop offers a look at the specific ways we women are called to trust in our lives and to be faithful to a spirituality that is truly life giving.



Foresters – Spirituality for Our Wisdom Years

27th June – 2nd July 2021 £375.00 per person
Led by Ron Rolheiser, OMI

This retreat is designed for more mature seekers who desire to mindfully embrace the challenges and opportunities of aging and diminishment by accessing the deep wisdom embedded in the world’s great mystical and contemplative traditions.

The goal of the Foresters program is to prepare participants to live wisely and well during their remaining years so that in the words of Henri Nouwen, “they might be able to give both their life and their death away” for the sake of the world.

For more information please visit www.orc-crewe.org
or phone Rachel on +44 1270 568653



25th Anniversary of St. Eugene's

A 25th anniversary is an important milestone in life. In marriages and religious consecrations, the 25th anniversary speaks of an established commitment that has already borne abundant fruits, even amid weaknesses and failures that still need to be overcome. In the Church, we celebrate jubilees with the spirit of remembrance, thanksgiving, purification, and a search for new life in Christ. Just as the Hebrew Jubilee was the occasion desired by God to re-establish sacred relationships between the members of the People of God and the latter with their Lord, so also in the Church we live it to resume our Christian vocation with complete integrity. To mark this event we would like to share a reflection written by Fr Bernard Dullier:

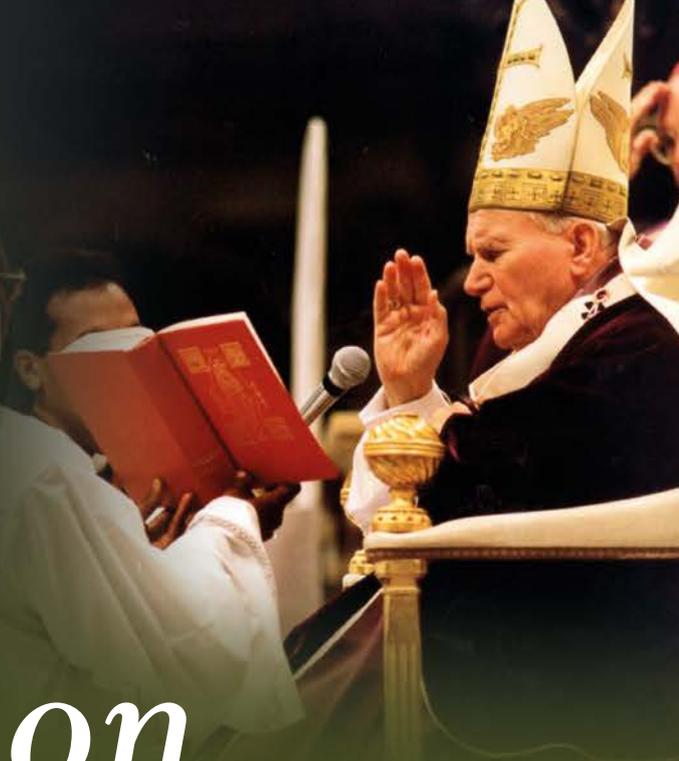
On December 3, 1995, John Paul II canonized Eugene de Mazenod. In the Church, as in civil society, one tries to celebrate such anniversaries. To some, such remembrances are bothersome; they stay away from them. Others find joy in them and they take part in their celebration. For some members of our communities, December 3 will be a day like all the rest. In other communities, it will be the occasion for a family celebration, indeed, a celebration to which we will invite others to join us.

For us, this canonization is the recognition by the Church of a WAY OF LIFE. Remembering this anniversary is not a question of our dipping into the past, nor for taking pride that we too, just like the great Orders, have a canonized Founder. It is not a question of having a celebration with no tomorrow nor of escaping our world of today.

It is the recognition of the WAY OF LIFE walked by Eugene de Mazenod. It is recognizing it as a WAY OF LIFE for each of us. It is recognizing it as a possible WAY OF LIFE for men and women of today. This WAY OF LIFE is first of all recognition of the eternal youth and the eternal newness of Jesus Christ.

From his Good Friday Experience of 1807 until the last days of his life, Eugene de Mazenod allowed himself to be surprised, amazed, and captivated by Christ. He allowed himself to be transformed by Christ. He accepted the loss of his certainties and his ready-made ideas. He accepted that Christ would daily reveal to him a new face, ever original, ever amazing. Eugene de Mazenod, a man with truths to believe and to communicate. He is a man of the encounter, the encounter with Christ, the Man living in the midst of mankind; the encounter with Christ, lover of the Father; the encounter with Christ, lover of mankind; the encounter with Christ, the Saviour who reveals and brings about the dignity of each human person.

This celebration of the anniversary of the canonization of Saint Eugene allows us, no matter how old we are and no matter what our missionary situation, to be transformed by the eternal youth and the eternal newness of Christ. It allows us today to be captivated by the eternal youth and the eternal newness of Christ. (cf. Jeremiah 20:7) It is the Christ who called us and captivated us on the day of our first oblation. This WAY OF LIFE is, then, a recognition of the great dignity of each human person.



Canonisation



It is the way that led Count de Mazenod, who had looked down upon his fellow men with disdain, disgust and a caste spirit, to become Father Mazenod, telling the poor of every stripe—the youth on the streets, the prisoners, the artisans, the unemployed, the farm workers—that they were God’s favourites, and that God alone is dear to each of them. He told them with his words and the life he lived, no matter what the consequences would be. Priest, founder, bishop, he loved each person he met. Each person was unique for him, loveable and worthy of respect.

His whole life he lived “for the glory of God.” But for him, “the glory of God is man fully alive.” His delight in the eternal newness of Christ became delight in man, in humanity with its thousands of faces, and in particular, in those who no longer had a reason to be hopeful, in whom the gates of life had been closed, “for those who in the eyes of the world were loathsome.” (cf. sermon at the Church of the Madeleine) Or worse still, those for whom the world no longer even takes into account.

To celebrate the anniversary of the canonization of Saint Eugene allows us, no matter how old we are and no matter what our missionary situation, to be transformed by man who is the image and likeness of God, by man whose name God “has written on the palm of his hand, for he is precious in his eyes” (Isaiah 49:16). Man who captivated us on the day of our first oblation.

The celebration of the anniversary of the canonization of Saint Eugene invites us to remember our own call and our own Oblate vocation. It invites us to renew ourselves by our actions, by our life, by our prayer, by and by our presence.

To conclude let us remember the words of Archbishop Feidt, when he invited his people to share in the mission to share Eugene’s message to people of today: “Let us look beyond the walls of our churches. Let us become aware of the silent petitions issuing from the hearts of so many of our brothers and sisters who live in this city and who are searching in darkness for the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

A young girl with dark hair is looking through a chain-link fence. Her face is partially obscured by the metal mesh. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an outdoor setting with some structures.

“If every human being possesses an inalienable dignity, if all people are my brothers and sisters, and if the world truly belongs to everyone, then it matters little whether my neighbor was born in my country or elsewhere”
– Pope Francis, “Fratelli Tutti”

A Vision For a Post

In essence, Pope Francis’ recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti – On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, tries to lay out the reasons why there is so much injustice, inequality, and community breakdown in our world and how in faith and love these can be addressed.

In brief, the encyclical has eight chapters within which Francis describes what he calls the darkening clouds over a closed world; the displacement of people around the world and the world’s struggle to deal with this; the need for a new vision for solidarity for our world; the need to open our hearts in a new way to make this vision a reality; the need for a better politics; the need for dialogue at all levels; the paths through which this dialogue can happen; and how all religions, not just Christianity, are needed to bring about a new order. The task of this article is to try to name four of the special challenges it brings to us as members of the Oblate Family.

1. Our call to serve the poor: Looking at the present situation in our world, the encyclical submits that in many ways our world is a broken world and it names some of the reasons for this: the globalization of self-interest, the globalization of superficiality, and the abuse of social media. This has made for a situation of the survival of the fittest. Now, while the situation is broken for everyone, it is the poor who end up suffering the most. The rich are getting richer, the powerful are getting more powerful, the poor are growing poorer and are losing what little power they ever had. There is an ever-increasing inequality of wealth and power between the rich and the poor. The world is become ever blinder and more hardened vis-à-vis the situation of the poor. Inequality is now accepted as normal and as moral and indeed is often defended in the name of God and religion. The poor are becoming disposable and are lacking needed

advocates who can share their experience, help them in their situation, and advocate for them at the centres of power.

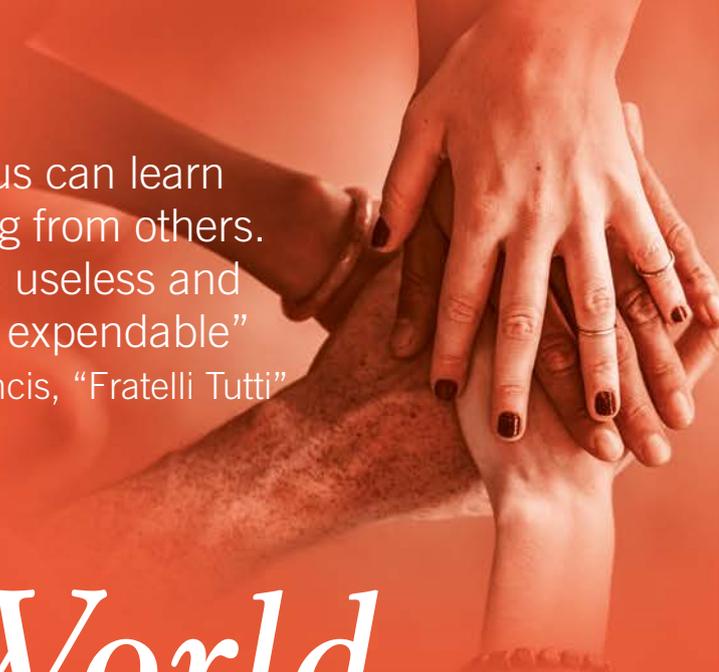
The Oblate charism is meant to address precisely this. There can be no clearer call to us move with deliberateness and with all the resources at our disposal to be with those who are being ignored, left outside, left behind, and rendered disposable by the economic, social, and political powers today. We must recognize that, worldwide, the dignity and rights of women are far from being upheld and our advocacy for the poor must include and highlight this inequality and injustice. Like the Good Samaritan our eye must always be trained to see who is laying in the ditch. Who needs help and is being ignored?

- *“Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others. Wealth has increased, but together with inequality.”*
- *“While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights discarded or violated.”*
- *“It is unacceptable that some have fewer rights by virtue of being women.”*

2. Our call to be missionary: Globalization has created new frontiers. As missionaries, we are sent out to everyone, irrespective of geographical, ethnic, social, or religious borders. Like the Good Samaritan our missionary eye must not distinguish our own from what is foreign. We must remain strongly rooted inside our history and our tradition, but we must be open to what is new, what is foreign, and what stretches to where we have never been before. And, in a time of bitterness, hatred, and animosity, as missionaries, we must be tender and gracious, always speaking out of love and not out of hatred, even when being prophetic.



“Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable”
– Pope Francis, “Fratelli Tutti”



Pandemic World

- “We can start from below and, case by case, act at the most concrete and local levels, and then expand to the farthest reaches of our countries and our world, with the same care and concern that the Samaritan showed for each of the wounded man’s injuries. Let us seek out others and embrace the world as it is, without fear of pain or a sense of inadequacy, because there we will discover all the goodness that God has planted in human hearts.”
- [Our missionary efforts call] “for a ‘tender’ love Saint Paul describes kindness as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). He uses the Greek word *chrestótes*, which describes an attitude that is gentle, pleasant and supportive, not rude or coarse.”
- “Kindness ought to be cultivated; it is no superficial bourgeois virtue.”

3. Our call to be daring: The encyclical tells us that genuine daring is not predicated on simple risk-taking and prudent calculation, it is predicated on hope, that is, on the trust that God is still Lord of this earth and that we can take God’s word at face value. Also, the encyclical invites us to be daring because in too many instances the old is no longer working and the signs of the times invite us to a new imagination, new courage, and a new fearlessness in the face of opposition and the seeming powerlessness we have in the face of the mega powers that are dictating what is happening in our world.

- “Hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfilment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations

which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile”.

4. Our call to have Mary as our Patroness:

The encyclical twice refers explicitly to Mary, submitting that, in imitation of her, we should be persons who “build bridges, break down walls, and sow seeds of reconciliation.” The community of love which we are trying to build needs a mother – she can give birth to this new world.

- “And in imitation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, we want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity... to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation”.
- “For many Christians, this journey of fraternity also has a Mother, whose name is Mary. Having received this universal motherhood at the foot of the cross (cf. Jn19:26), she cares not only for Jesus but also for “the rest of her children” (cf. Rev12:17). In the power of the risen Lord, she wants to give birth to a new world, where all of us are brothers and sisters, where there is room for all those whom our societies discard, where justice and peace are resplendent.”





The Story of The Contribution of

– From the Archives

Throughout the UK and Ireland parish communities are under pressure to survive, for all sorts of reasons. The pressure brings to the surface how dear parish community is to the faithful. They dread losing it. The Holy See has urged bishops to tread carefully!

At a time when our Oblate province is under pressure to reimagine its mission it is good to look back at its beginnings. If we took a snapshot of our mission at the end of 1848 (you will see shortly why I choose that date) we would see a scattering of rural mission centres - all in England - and a small number of young Oblates, reaching out to local Catholics who otherwise rarely saw a priest, and to Protestants wanting to learn about the Catholic Church – it was the time of ‘the Second Spring’.

There were difficulties, but a tour of inspection made by Fr Casimir Aubert in 1848 had shown the mission had the potentiality to grow. The tour had begun in Ashbourne in Derbyshire, going on to Everingham in Yorkshire and Penzance in Cornwall. Serious discussions had followed in Marseilles with Superior General St Eugene. The realization came that if the mission was to be effective and prosper then its organization had to be tightened up and its vision broadened. Stronger local leadership was needed. St Eugene was still managing the whole Oblate mission, ranging from Canada to Sri Lanka, out of his episcopal residence in Marseilles in France. His workload was heavy, and communications over vast distances were slow. It was time for St Eugene to let go of some of this work.

The solution was to set up a ‘province’ for Great Britain and Ireland with a ‘provincial’ as regional CEO. A document recently unearthed by our archivist Catherine Mullan casts fresh light on how St Eugene sent Fr Aubert to experiment with this new method of governance. Dated 1 January 1849, authored by Fr Casimir Aubert OMI, a French Oblate who had been involved with the mission from its beginnings and who enjoyed the whole trust of St. Eugene, it states that he has been sent to England by St. Eugene “to constitute the houses and missions there as a regular province.” This he now proceeded to do:

As General Visitor and finally as the first Provincial, Fr Casimir was ‘inseparably associated with the foundation and development’ of this Province - indeed, its ‘Founder’

“The English Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Virgin Mary is constituted as of today and is henceforth deemed to be canonically constituted. There belong to this province all the houses and missions which the said Congregation holds and will hold in future, whether in Greater Britain or in Ireland and Scotland, and the subjects of the said houses whether Fathers, or Scholastics, or Lay Brothers, or finally Novices.”

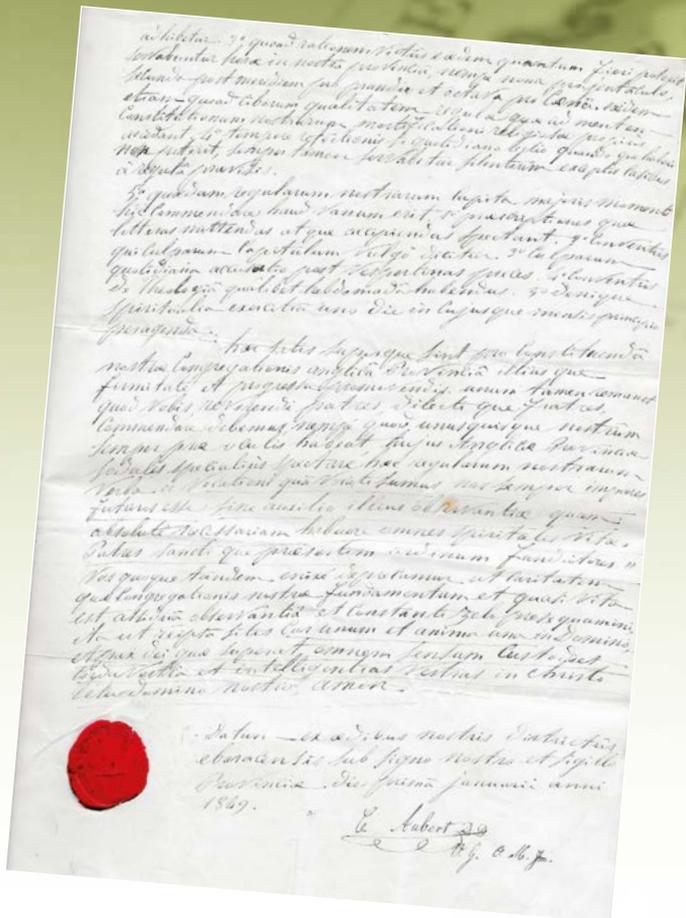
You will, I think, search in vain in Oblate history books for any reference to this event. Henceforth Fr Casimir continued his work in England, not as the Visitor to the missions in England but as Visitor to the Province of England. The new approach immediately bore fruit as we see in the letter he wrote four months later:

“Scarcely four months have elapsed since the Province of England was constituted on a regular basis and already, it is watered by an abundant shower of graces from heaven...”

In gratitude to Our Lady he calls on the Province to commit to the May devotions. To mark the province’s first anniversary he wrote again, this time from Maryvale, Birmingham:

Our Beginnings

Fr Casimir Aubert, OMI



"After a year has gone by and in a period in which our English Province is beginning to take shape, we consider it both opportune and useful to address you with a few words... For you will not have forgotten how many obstacles were besetting us, how insecure and frail was the condition of our Congregation in England at the beginning of the past year. But the divine goodness so disposed it that slowly in a wonderful manner it was turned around... The Formation House was set on a regular basis, thanks to the hospitality shown us by the Very Rev. Dr Briggs, the vicar apostolic of York, and six months later this house was moved to the very famous locality in the Central District which bears the name Maryvale where our Congregation, placed on a firmer basis under the auspices of the Very Rev. Dr Ullathorne, was able to achieve its aims more easily...

The year 1850 saw the opening of new missions, not in rural but urban areas, and serving specifically the Irish immigrants, many of them victims of the Irish famine. It was also the year of St Eugene's successful visit to England before the 1850 Chapter in August. That Chapter, held in Marseilles, reorganized the Oblate congregation on the principle of devolution into provinces, in the way we are familiar with today.

When Fr Casimir returned to England after the Chapter, he hastened to explain to the missionaries, in a letter dated October 30, 1850, that the arrangements he had made were unchanged. The Oblate mission in Britain and Ireland was governed under the document of January 1, 1849, until the decrees of the General Chapter of 1850 were put into effect in April 1851 when four provinces were recognized: two in France, and the British province and Canada.

With its newfound strength the mission was able to overcome its difficulties, and the province turned decisively to an urban mission in Liverpool, Leeds, Dublin, Leith and London.

As General Visitor and finally as the first Provincial, Fr Casimir was 'inseparably associated with the foundation and development' of this Province - indeed, its 'Founder' - and earned its gratitude. May his prayers help us and our Congregation and Church through present difficulties.

- Michael Hughes, OMI

Oblate Mission Shop

www.oblates.ie/mission-shop

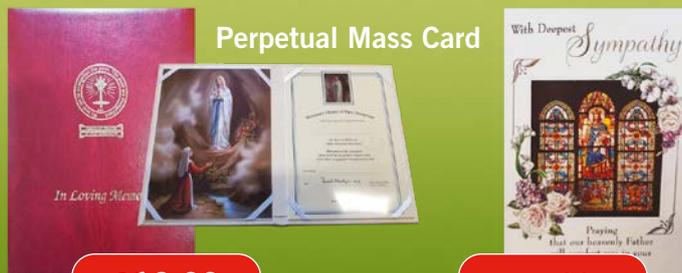
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Oblate Lotto

Comming soon

We will soon launch this lotto to raise funds for the Oblate Covid Appeal and other missionary activities. By joining you are contributing to these good causes and at the same time getting the chance to win a prize.

Oblate missions are located in some of the poorest part of the world, so this financial support can make all the difference. Please join and also don't forget to tell your friends.

The first draw will take place at Christmas.
For more information visit www.oblates.ie



If you would like to share your thoughts or ideas with us please contact: Fr. Brian Maher OMI, Partners in Mission Office, Denis Hurley House, 14 Quex Road, London NW6 4PL or email pim@oblates.co.uk

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