



Missionary Oblates
– Always Close to the People

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Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.50, 17th February, 2021

Yes ! 2021 has arrived. It has begun like no other year in living memory. As one human family we are faced with the reality of the pandemic that is rampant on our planet. We have to take responsibility for the health and wellbeing of one another as never before. As Oblates of Mary Immaculate and members of the Oblate Family where do we fit in with this new reality? We are called to be channels of God’s love; the Good News of Jesus Christ according to the Charism of Eugene De Mazenod. Circumstances have changed, yet the Message remains the same. We sum it up in our Mission Statement:

“Profoundly respecting the dignity and sacredness of each person, we seek to grow close to Christ and make him known through our way of life and ministry. We commit ourselves principally to those on the margins of church and society.”

This edition of “Connections “in the fiftieth edition. The first edition was published on the 17th of

February 2009. The opening message stated “It is hoped that as we establish our new initiative to build up the Oblate Family we will be able to continue our relationship with those we have journeyed with over many years as well as establishing new possibilities.” That aspiration continues in importance more than ten years later as we journey through this time of change towards new beginnings.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed articles over the years. Like the Oblate Missionary Record/ Lourdes Messenger before it, Connections has helped to bring the story of the Oblate Mission into the homes of so many and continues to invite people to share in and support the Oblate Mission. In a time when it has become so difficult to meet and support one another, “Connections” helps to bridge that gap and do what its title suggests: connect us to one another as members of the Oblate Family.

– Fr. Oliver Barry, OMI, Provincial

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The Illusion of Invulnerability

– Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger. That's a pious axiom that doesn't always hold up. Sometimes the bad time comes and we don't learn anything. Hopefully this present bad time, Covid-19, will teach us something and make us stronger. My hope is that Covid-19 will teach us something that previous generations didn't need to be taught but already knew through their lived experience; namely, that we're not invulnerable, that we aren't exempt from the threat of sickness, debilitation, and death. In short, all that our contemporary world can offer us in terms of technology, medicine, nutrition, and insurance of every kind, doesn't exempt us from fragility and vulnerability. Covid-19 has taught us that. Just like everyone else who has ever walked this earth, we're vulnerable.

I'm old enough to have known a previous generation when most people lived with a lot of fear, not all of it healthy, but all of it real. Life was fragile. Giving birth to a child could mean your death. A flu or virus could kill you and you had little defense against it. You could die young from heart disease, cancer, diabetes, bad sanitation, and dozens of other things. And nature itself could pose a threat. Storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, drought, pestilence, lightning, these were all to be feared because we were mostly helpless against them. People lived with a sense that life and health were fragile, not to be taken for granted.

But then along came vaccinations, penicillin, better hospitals, better medicines, safer childbirth, better nutrition, better housing, better sanitation, better roads, better cars, and better insurance against everything from loss of work, to drought, to storms, to pestilence, to disasters of any kind. And along with that came an ever-increasing sense that we're safe, protected, secure, different than previous generations, able to take care of ourselves, no longer as vulnerable as were the generations before us.

And to a large extent that's true, at least in terms of our physical health and safety. In many ways, we're far less vulnerable than previous generations. But, as Covid-19 has made evident, this is not a fully safe harbor. Despite much denial and protest, we've had to accept that we now live as did everyone before us, that is, as unable to guarantee own health and safety. For all the dreadful things Covid-19 has done to us, it has helped dispel an illusion, the illusion of our own invulnerability. We're fragile, vulnerable, mortal.

At first glance, this seems like a bad thing; it's not. Disillusionment is the dispelling of an illusion and we have for too long (and too glibly) been living an illusion, that is, living under a pall of false enchantment which has us believing that the threats of old no longer have power to touch us. And how wrong we are! As of the time of this writing there are 70.1 million Covid-19 cases reported worldwide and there have been more than 1.6 million reported deaths from this virus. Moreover the highest rates of infection and death have been in those countries we would think most invulnerable, countries that have the best hospitals and highest standards of medicine to protect us. That should be a wake-up call. For all the good things our modern and post-modern world can give us, in the end it can't protect us from everything, even as it gives us the sense that it can.

Covid-19 has been a game-changer; it has dispelled an illusion, that of our own invulnerability. What's to be learned? In short, that our generation must take its place with all other generations, recognizing that we cannot take life, health, family, work, community, travel, recreation, freedom to gather, and freedom to go to church, for granted. Covid-19 has taught us that we're not the Lord of life and that fragility is still the lot of everyone, even in a modern and post-modern world.



Classical Christian theology and philosophy have always taught that as humans we are not self-sufficient. Only God is. Only God is “Self-sufficient Being” (Ipsum Esse Subsistens, in classical philosophy). The rest of us are contingent, dependent, interdependent ... and mortal enough to fear the next appointment with our doctor. Former generations, because they lacked our medical knowledge, our doctors, our hospitals, our standards of hygiene, our medicines, our vaccines, and our antibiotics, existentially felt their contingency. They knew they weren’t self-sufficient and that life and health could not be taken for granted. I don’t envy them some of the false fear that came with that, but I do envy them not living under a pall of false security. Our contemporary world, for all the good things it gives us, has lulled us asleep in terms of our fragility, vulnerability, and mortality. Covid-19 is a wake-up call, not just to the fact that we’re vulnerable, but especially to the fact that we may not take for granted the precious gifts of health, family, work, community, travel, recreation, freedom to gather, and (yes) even of going to church.

Covid-19 has taught us that we’re not the Lord of life and that fragility is still the lot of everyone, even in a modern and post-modern world.



Time to Globalise Compassion

Probably for the first time in history the peoples of the earth are all facing the same deadly viral threat at the same time. Globalisation and the unprecedented movement of people across the planet have enabled both the rapid spread of the virus and the speedy development of vaccines to combat it. Developments in communications and internet-based technologies allow us to track daily, across the continents, the terrible toll exacted by the pandemic everywhere, and particularly in weakly governed and poorer countries. Hopefully 2021 will see the much-awaited vaccines shared equitably and globally, and in solidarity with those who have suffered most and have least.

Those of us who live in richer countries are generally better able to avoid contracting Covid-19. And should we become infected, we are more likely to recover with the support of excellent — if over-stretched — healthcare services and access to the best available medical science.

Mature states with functioning government structures to manage emergencies, have the capacity to mitigate the impact on individuals and communities, while maintaining sufficient economic activity through the crisis to ensure vital services continue uninterrupted.

We are further protected by reasonably high levels of trust in society, and widespread compliance with often irksome regulations to ‘flatten the curve’ on the spread of infection and keep each other safe.



The story is very different for most people in developing countries. For over 20 years, the Oblate Mission Development Office has been supporting some of the poorest of these communities to improve their quality of life through projects in education, skills training, healthcare, sustainable food production and water security, and projects to protect or recover vulnerable aspects of their environments.

Last year (2020), however, our focus had to switch almost entirely from development to responding to Covid-19 related requests for emergency help.

Thanks to generous donors, consistent backing from the Anglo-Irish Oblate province, and excellent support — financial and through web-based training programmes — from our main funder, Misesan Cara, we have been responding to these requests for help, and supporting communities to protect themselves against the spread of the virus and mitigate the impact of sudden lockdowns on families who live on the little they earn each day.



“We have been responding to these requests for help, and supporting communities to protect themselves against the spread of the virus and mitigate the impact of sudden lockdowns on families who live on the little they earn each day.”

Based in about 10 countries, mainly in Africa and Asia, all of these projects have been purchasing and distributing supplies of hand sanitizer, masks, basic hand washing facilities, safe water storage, soaps etc, and anti-bacterial disinfectants.

The materials are sourced and distributed through Oblate parishes and school communities. In all cases distribution is preceded by an information session on the virus, given by a credible healthcare professional, where people learn to identify Covid-19 symptoms and the steps necessary to reduce the spread of infection. They also learn the importance of isolating and safely supporting a family member showing symptoms the virus.

Further problems arose for poor communities when governments ordered sudden lockdowns but failed to provide any protection or safety net for those who instantly lost their subsistence income. Families had no reserves; very quickly food and clothing became the more urgent needs.

We have been able, with our colleagues working on the ground, to add family food rations to the packs for distribution prepared by volunteers. We have also supported parishes to pay subsistence allowance to teachers who were no longer paid because schools were closed. The same was true for parish catechists and other workers. All these, too, had their families to feed and look after.

The mission hospitals and medical centre that we have been able to support required masks, hand-sanitizer etc, as above. In addition, they urgently needed protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare staff caring for Covid patients, and medical equipment to support the more seriously ill patients. That list included, electronic ‘non-touch’ thermometers, oxygen compressors, oximeters and further equipment to assist breathing and monitor patients.



Before the virus reached them, each of the hospitals had recognised their vulnerability (their remote rural locations, close to a porous border with South Africa put them on the front line to become carers for sick people returning home) and had developed a plan to guide their management and treatment of Covid patients while also protecting their non-Covid services, including their maternity care units. Strengthening triage arrangements and preparing isolation spaces were identified as the key priorities. Misesan Cara grants covered most of the cost of this development at each hospital.

Later in the year when pressure on staff became unbearable, we were able, through Misesan Cara, to provide some respite and boost staff morale by funding additional staff positions so that tired people could take time off.

Thanks to a Misesan Cara initiative, healthcare personnel from around the developing world, including those we were working with, were able to join, via Zoom, an excellent training programme for medical

staff in less developed healthcare systems. The training concentrated on making best use of resources available to help patients recover, reduce infection spread, and protect healthcare staff and their non-Covid patients. This training was practical, immediately helpful and much appreciated by participants.

Now that we can review the uniquely challenging year of 2020, I'm struck, not for the first time, by the remarkable resilience of very poor people when faced with crisis, by the moving examples of the human spirit triumphing in even the darkest days, and by the small daily miracles achieved by modestly funded projects organised by remarkably courageous and generous people working under extreme pressure in dangerous circumstances.

I have also been humbled and inspired by the generosity of our donors. Your compassion is indeed global and is a powerfully encouraging sign for the future sharing of vaccine resources.

– Fr. Tom McCabe OMI

The Church Doesn't Have a Mission; The Mission Has a Church



“If your mission is to fill buildings, then keep going with your current strategy. But if your mission is to reach people, it might be time to rethink things.”
– Carey Nieuwhof

As I begin Sunday Mass, I look around to observe who is present. A task that is not so simple as the parishioners are scattered throughout the church in order to respect physical distancing while maintaining the 30 percent capacity allowance. Everybody is wearing a mask and I’m “blinded” by the spotlights. At the same time, I’m very much aware that the cameras are rolling since we live-stream our Masses. I try to imagine who is joining us on the other side of the screen. Like it or not, this is the reality of how the Church gathers today; this is a new way of being Church – the “hybrid” Church.

Our mission has never been to fill the buildings (as tempting and satisfying as this might have been); but rather to reach the people wherever they are, to go beyond the walls. Throughout the centuries, the way of being the Church has changed according to the reality of the social environment. In the beginning first Christians gathered in homes, often in secret due to persecution. In the middle ages, beautiful cathedrals, which are real pieces of art, were built across the European countries as places of gathering and worship. Then, the Second Vatican Council updated the liturgy and understanding of the Church in the modern times. And now, the COVID-19 pandemic brings us into a new face of being the Church. As much as there is a temptation and sentiment that one day things will go back to “normal”; the reality is there is no way back, the only way is to move forward.

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The way we gather as Church might have changed through history; but the mission has never changed! “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...’” (Matthew 28:18-19). The church doesn’t have a mission; the mission has a church.

Christopher J.H. Wright wrote, “It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God’s mission.” It’s a paradigm shift, when we realize that this is not about us, but about God’s mission, *Missio Dei*, in the world of today.

There is nothing that can replace or substitute the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This is “the wedding banquet” where we open the scriptures and break the bread, being nourished and sustained. However, maybe, just maybe, the current time of the history is the moment of the Gospel story when we are being invited to embrace God’s mission to “Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” (Matthew 22:9)

“The digital genie is out of the bottle. Your church is still around. The church is still around. It’s just leaving the building.” Carey Nieuwhof

– Jarek Pachocki, OMI

Keeping The Faith in Edinburgh

In this article Fr Martin Moran and members of the parish community in Leith share their experiences of living a life of faith in the midst of the pandemic.

Like everyone else, our ministry for the last few months has been mostly of the virtual world. Since lockdown we have live-streamed all our Masses and other liturgies. This has been much appreciated by the parishioners and by nature of the virtual world our reach has gone way beyond our parish boundaries.

Places of worship in Scotland closed again on the 26th of December due to the rampant increase in the number of people now affected with Coronavirus. We do not know for how long this will be the case. Our own parishioners accept this government decision as the wise thing to do in the light of the new variant.

Thankfully, our live streaming has come into its own. As one parishioner said, "it's like being in church." Throughout the various lockdowns we have maintained good contact with the parishioners by telephone calls and emails. It is difficult not being able to visit people in their homes or hospitals, except in extraordinary circumstances.

We have continued our three Facebook pages and we are getting incredibly positive feedback from lots of people saying that they find the posts remarkably interesting and helpful especially during this difficult time. We continue to appreciate the help and support from Rebecca. We have relaunched our parish webpage! Many of our parishioners and Facebook followers continue to participate and follow the events hosted by the "The Oblates" website. There was a lot of incredibly positive feedback for the Advent Retreat. People found it to be a very prayerful and moving experience. They particularly appreciated the talks and the chance to share with other people from around the world

As all of us are aware, this is an ever-changing situation and there could be further restrictions imposed. Like everywhere else it is not always a forward-facing trajectory. The pandemic has brought great hardship to many people. In the light of this the parish has set up a Foodbank distribution point. This has worked well, and many families have benefitted from it. It is sad that it is needed. We have been truly overwhelmed by the generosity of our parishioners. Thanks to them we play an important role in helping to alleviate the

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dire situation some people find themselves in. We were able to expand our outreach, to families, single people living in B&B accommodation, two local primary schools and the Missionary Sisters of Charity.

Alongside our ongoing parish ministry, we have also availed of modern technology to conduct several Retreats. This included a 1-2-1 guided Retreat and a preached Retreat to a community of sisters in Felixstowe on the theme of Laudato Si. After some careful planning we also held an Advent Retreat here in the house for 12 people.

Christmas day was the last time that the Oblate Community were able to meet because the new restrictions started again on the 26th of December. We look forward to the day when we can gather again.

– Martin Moran, OMI

When we first heard about COVID-19, like anyone else we had no concept of the utter destruction of society that we all take for granted: If we're ill the doctor is at the end of a phone; we make plans for weeks, sometimes months, in advance; we can do and go most places without a feeling of fear; we look forward to seeing other people even if we don't know their names; the need for the sense of security is also diminished. I think we underestimated just how bad things would get.



We have all struggled with not being able to attend Church, seeing our families or friends, the opportunity to go places that a family can have outside fun was lost. The abundant amounts of people dying was devastating and still is. The feeling of helplessness is sometimes too much.

When some kind of normal returned for the noticeably short time, and then was snatched away, it was more difficult to get over but we just need to have HOPE, maintain our LOVE and rely on our FAITH, and one day we'll all have the PEACE and JOY to continue our lives again, never taking anything for granted but cherished.

– Eileen & Gary Falconer

In mid-March, just before the first nationwide lockdown, we had been to visit family in England to let them know that we were expecting our second child. Our journey down to England on 12 March 2020 was as normal as could be expected but the scale and speed of change brought on by the pandemic was illustrated by how different things felt on the return journey and the days beyond. We returned by train on Sunday 15 March 2020 to continuous reminders of hand washing and cough etiquette. The following day then turned out to be the last one we would spend in the office, having still not returned. Like many others around Scotland, we then embarked on around 6 months of balancing homeworking and childcare for our 2-year-old.

The first few weeks were exceedingly difficult with things feeling quite claustrophobic and directionless but we soon settled into a routine and managed to create a new kind of normality for ourselves. In August we even managed to find time amidst relaxed restrictions to visit family in Perthshire ahead of our daughter returning to her reopened nursery. All of this came just before the birth of our second child, Eleanor Grace on the 17th September. Maternity leave certainly hasn't been as expected with only about half the family being able to meet Eleanor before travel restrictions and prohibitions on household

meetings took effect. We even managed to miss out on a Baptism in November with further restrictions coming in just before the proposed date. Even so, we continue to find a way to make things work and find plenty of enjoyment in our newly extended family.

– Liam and Rebecca Cahill

COVID-19 year 1 has been a mixture of emotions: worry and concern and fear and sadness and month after month of enforced separation from family and friends and church and school and routine. Initially as the restrictions increased and with the growing fear of what was predicted to happen, we were apprehensive but after several weeks we settled down to the new order.

We have worried a lot about how close COVID-19 will hit our families and friends. We both, along with about twenty of our close family and friends, over Christmas and New Year contracted COVID-19 and survived without medical treatment, although it was very bad for us and some others. Worry a lot about the severe damage to our society and economy and to the education of our children. So much damage and hurt to poor families who were already struggling.

The great hope is the Vaccine, we pray it does work. And we are an extraordinarily rich country and we are struggling to cope, who will help the world's poor? The extent of what has happened and its continuing harsh impact will be here for decades especially harsh on the poor and the weak. We will all look back on these years in a similar way that we look back on the WW2 era, the world before and the world after COVID-19.

– John and Eleanor Donahue

Last March was the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. Suddenly the world seemed such a scary place, where we felt helpless and vulnerable. Our hospitals filled and so many people ill and dying and all that this pandemic holds for each one of us.

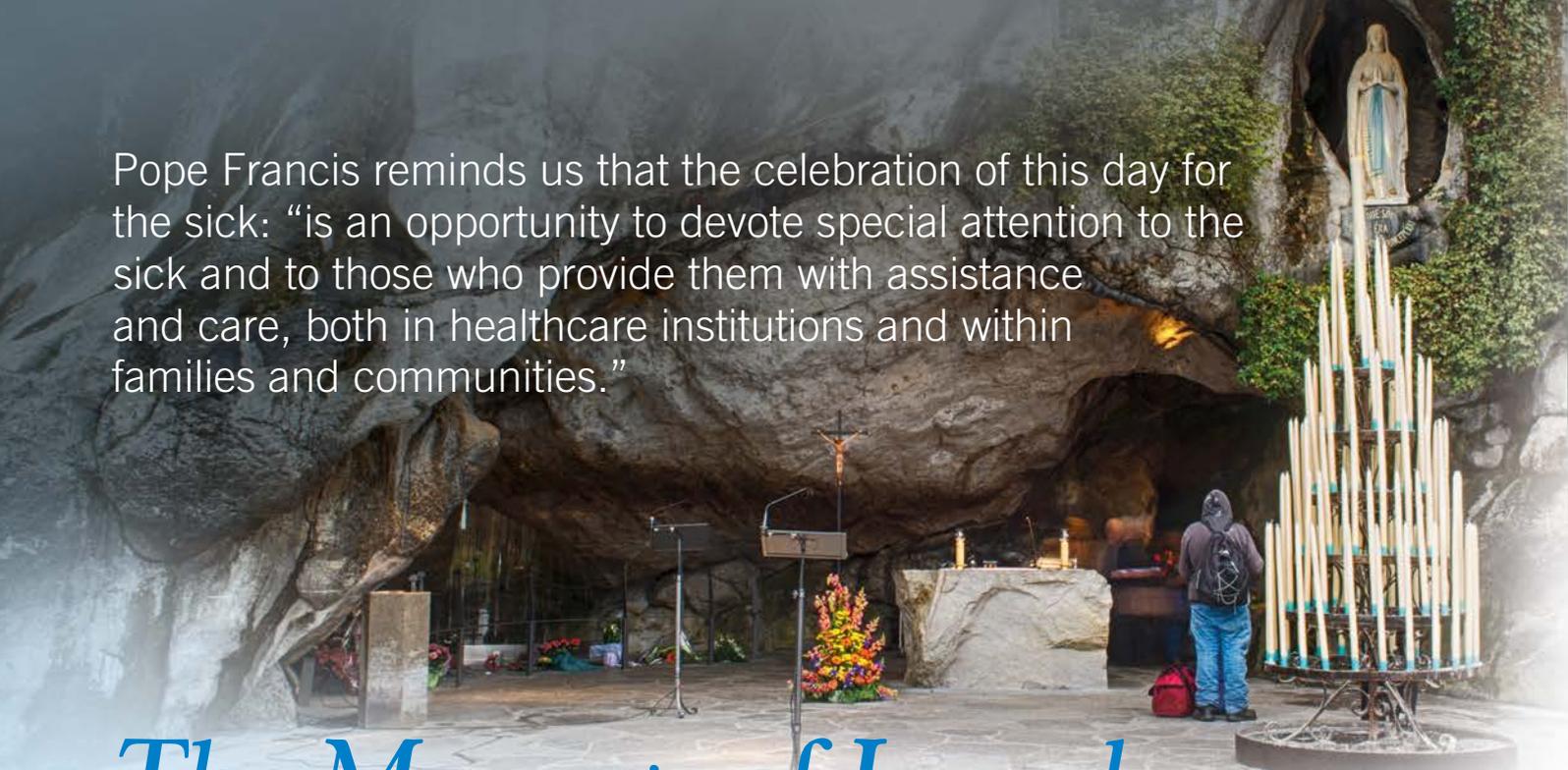
I am trying not to get preoccupied about all the information that we are seeing and hearing on the news each day, which is heart breaking for what so many families are having to go through.

I decided to try living in the present moment of each day, keeping my mind still, putting my trust, faith and hope and control into God's hands.

We have this new vaccine which will be given. So now we do have that hope for our world and the future.

– Joyce Fegan

Pope Francis reminds us that the celebration of this day for the sick: “is an opportunity to devote special attention to the sick and to those who provide them with assistance and care, both in healthcare institutions and within families and communities.”



The Message of Lourdes & The World Day of The Sick

I don't know if you have ever travelled to Lourdes in February. For most of our pilgrims, the experience of Lourdes is in the Autumn, in September. The leaves are just beginning to change colour, there can be a small chill in the evening breeze, and (although they seem to be harder and harder to find!), I always look out for horse chestnuts on the ground. So many of nature's symbols to tell us that we are getting towards the end of the year.

Lourdes in February is quite different. Rain. Snow. Icy temperatures. Winter Sun. Warm days. It can be any and all of these. If there are signs of Spring, they are few and far between.

So, February is different. But for all those differences in terms of weather, perhaps the greatest difference, the absence that makes it almost a different place, is that except for very few and small groups, Lourdes in February is Lourdes without the sick. And that absence is not just in physical terms; no long lines of wheelchairs or voiture bleus (known more colloquially as chariots), the absence goes to the very core and the message that is central to Lourdes itself. As someone said to me a few months back, Lourdes without the sick is like St Vincent de Paul without the poor.

February 11, the Feast Day of Our Lady of Lourdes, is also the World Day of the Sick, a celebration introduced twenty-nine years ago by Saint Pope John Paul II. In his message for this year, Pope Francis reminds us that the celebration of this day for the sick: “is an opportunity to devote special attention to the sick and to those who provide them with assistance and care, both in healthcare institutions and within families and communities.”

Pope Francis points us to something very much at the centre of the experience of sickness when he writes that sickness: “makes us realise our own vulnerability and our innate need of others.” Our human condition means we want to be in control, but sickness can change all of that. A great friend and a great servant of our pilgrimage, now deceased, said to me when he became seriously ill that in all his years of giving service, he never realised how hard it was to receive service. He felt vulnerable and dependent and as Pope Francis says: “It makes us feel all the more clearly that we are creatures dependent on God.” This past year has brought this home to us; Covid-19 has shown it to us in tragedy, and in sickness. Covid-19 has heightened our awareness of what it means to be vulnerable and how each of us has a responsibility, in fact, a duty, to care for and to protect those who are vulnerable. And in that moment, whether as carer or sick, we have no greater dependency than a dependency on God.



Lourdes is about service and hopefully, not just service when we are in Lourdes but service when we are at home too. In his message, Pope Francis focuses on this with his theme for World Day of the Sick 2021, which is drawn from St Matthew's Gospel (Mt 23:1-12) "in which Jesus criticises the hypocrisy of those who fail to practise what they preach." I am very aware of how, when I am in Lourdes, I can get caught up in the atmosphere of the pilgrimage and so, reaching out to the sick person before me is not too difficult. After all, I am with those who are doing the same (and probably a lot more). But when I go home? For me, I must be aware that my commitment to serve the sick is to do this wherever they are. The theme that Pope Francis has chosen this year for the celebration of World Day of the Sick is one that I need to take to heart and live it just as much in November or April or July as I do for five days in September.

For Pope Francis, he sees the response to the risk of hypocrisy as being to: "stop and listen, to establish a direct and personal relationship with others, to feel empathy and compassion, and to let their suffering become our own as we seek to serve them." During our 2019 pilgrimage, the last time we were there in person, I watched these words being lived out by one of our Oblate Youth Service. In recent years, we have arranged an afternoon out in the countryside for our sick. Arranging this speaks to a wise message that Miriam, our Director of Nursing communicates to us every year: "Remember, they are on their holidays!" On one such afternoon in 2019, I noticed a young woman from the Youth Service walking (wheeling) one of our sick, our Assisted Pilgrims, through a quieter part of the grounds. They stopped, and she moved in front of the wheelchair and sat down to speak with the woman sitting in it. While I could not hear what was being said, everything from the words of Pope Francis were echoed as I recall the image before me that afternoon. No words here can describe it but suffice it to say that I was very touched by it, so much so that later, I spoke with the young

woman about it, how meaningful it was, and as I left the Accueil on our last morning for our return to Dublin, I went up to her again and told her that when I remember 2019, I will remember the love, and care, and service, that she showed to one of our sick. And to this day, I do. And it evokes an emotional response in me now to remember it, just as it did when I witnessed it.

Returning to the message of Pope Francis, he makes what is, for me, a particularly important point and one that I have tried articulating in recent years. He says that: "Sickness always has more than one face." He says that it includes: "those who feel ignored, excluded and prey to social injustices that deny their fundamental rights." And if I can add another face that I think of a lot, then I'd like to include explicitly here, those who suffer silently from the pain of mental health. We need to be alert to the many faces of sickness, to practise what we preach wherever we encounter it, so that our spirit of service is alive wherever we are in that moment. A challenge yes, but did the founder of the Oblates, St Eugene de Mazenod, not call on us to, "leave nothing undared for the Gospel." Pope Francis puts it another way when he asks us, "not to look the other way" but to do just as, "healthcare personnel, volunteers, support staff, priests, men and women religious, all of whom have helped, treated, comforted and served so many of the sick and their families with professionalism, self-giving, responsibility and love of neighbour."

Which really brings us back to the central message of our Christian belief and our Christian faith. And Pope Francis wraps up his message with this when he writes: "the commandment of love that Jesus left to his disciples is also kept in our relationship with the sick." The most important commandment of all, to love my neighbour. And when my neighbour is sick, needs care, or help, needs someone to listen, someone to sit with, when we respond to that need in another, we bring the message of Lourdes home.

– Gerard Bennett

– Photo of Pope Francis ©Vatican Media



Early Oblate Apostles In British Columbia, Canada

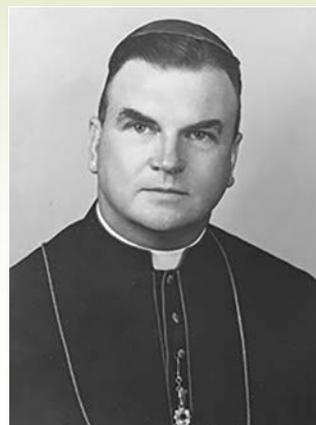
– From the Archives

Fr. Gerard Clenaghan, OMI writing in the De Mazenod Record, in 1969, stated that, *'In the course of man's struggle towards development and progress many a truly significant breakthrough is born in relative security. It remains for history to place these events in proper perspective.'*

Historical Background

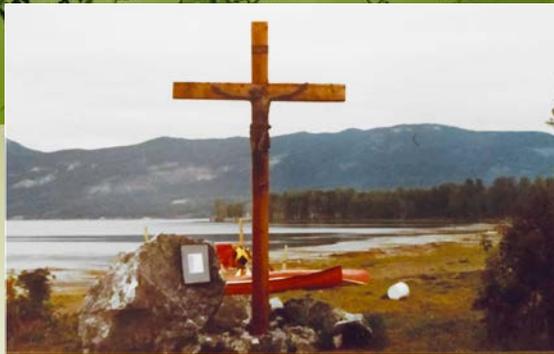
In 1945, the recently consecrated Bishop Anthony Jordan, OMI, recognised that in order to progress a successful educational and pastoral missionary service, sufficient priests, lay brothers and lay participants would be required to advance this evangelical movement. In 1947, as the Oblate General Chapter drew to a close in Rome, the Anglo- Irish Provincial, Fr. O'Shea, sent a telegram from Rome indicating that Bishop Anthony Jordan, OMI, V.A. of Prince Rupert was calling to Ireland on his way home to Canada. If permission given, he would ordain all scholastics in Piltown Scholasticate, County Offaly, who had been called to Orders. Such was the effect of his visit that between 1947 and 1950, circa twenty young Irish Oblate priests served throughout the Canadian missionary fields in Prince Rupert, Burns Lake, St. Peter's Parish, Prince George, Fort St. John, Whitehouse, New Westminster and Lejac.

The first newly ordained priests to arrive in Canada, were Frs. Clenaghan, Ballesty and Green, O.M.I., sailed from Liverpool and arriving in Montreal, six days later. By 1948, a further six priests departed for the Vicariate of Prince Rupert. On 22 September 1948, they set sail for Canada on the "Empress of France" from Liverpool and arrived in Montreal on 29 September. There they were met by Very Rev. Fr. Birch, OMI. their new Provincial, and Fr. Hall. OMI., Having stayed at the Provincial for a few days. On 1 October, the newly arrived missionary priests set



Bishop Anthony Jordan, OMI

out for their missionary placement: Fr. Thomas Sheil to Ft. St. John on the Peace river, Fr. J. O'Reilly to the town of McBride, Fr. P. Keane to Wells, a gold mining town, Frs. K. Silke and J. Jackson to Prince George, where a great lumbering business existed. Fr. O. Mohan arrived at Lejac, an Indian Residential school near Frazer Lake where he met up with Fr. Clenaghan before travelling onto Prince Rupert. The last missionary priest off the train was Fr. Bagues, who joined Fr. Callaly at Burns Lake.

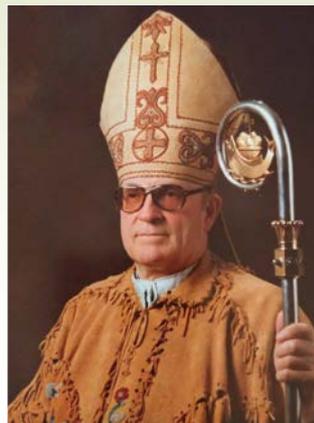


Camp Morice, Fort St James



The Steamboat St. Emile, an OMI ship on the Lesser Slave lake

It is now sixty-five years ago since the call went out to share the burden of missionary work by both religiously professed and lay peoples, amongst the indigenous Indian peoples and the massive influx of immigrants, seeking work in British Columbia.



Bishop O'Grady



Carrier Celebration

1955, Bishop Anthony Jordan, was appointed Archbishop of Edmonton and in 1956, Fr. Fergus O'Grady, OMI was consecrated Bishop and appointed Vicar Apostolic of Prince Rupert by Pope Pius X11. Cognisant of his responsibility to promote Christian education within the expanding urbanisation of the area and the growth of young people and the desire for education from the Indian population (the Carrier Indians), he developed a far-seeing plan of action. In early 1957, Bishop O'Grady, visited the Convent of Mercy in Callan, county Kilkenny, Ireland, in the hope of enticing the Sisters to come and work in his diocese of Prince Rupert. His proposal was to build many schools which would be staffed by the Sisters and lay people. By August, 1957, twenty-six Sisters of Mercy departed for Prince Rupert were responsible for staffing the new school of St. Maria Goretti School in Fort St. James.

Lay Apostolate

During his tenure, Bishop O'Grady continued to develop his Catholic volunteering movement within his Diocese, which formed the basis of his dream for building schools and churches throughout British Columbia. These volunteers became known as the 'Frontier Apostolate'. The volunteers received bed and board and a small weekly stipend of circa \$20. The volunteers came from all over the world and especially from Ireland and included teachers, nurses, administrative staff, cooks, carpenters, plumbers, electricians and builders. Within his term of office, over thirteen schools were built from kindergarten to high school. As Fr. Clenaghan stated in De Mazenod Record 'The integration of Indian and white youth was fundamental to religious, social and cultural development'.



The thaw, Fort St James



Reservation

In 1963, the Vicariate Apostolic of Prince Rupert was elevated to a diocese and changed its name to Diocese of Prince George, administration being moved from Prince Rupert to Prince George.

Over the years approximately 4,000 people from five continents became part of this movement. Bishop O'Grady's ability to liaise amongst the political and economic classes enabled him to forestall Prime Minister 'Trudeau's infamous white paper policy' which called for an end to the Indian Act and Aboriginal people's special status in Canada. In doing so, it allowed Catholic independent schools to receive federal funding for "operational and capital expenses necessarily incurred in providing education for Indian children". Sadly low pupil registration forced the closure of O'Grady High School in 2001 and St. Joseph's Elementary school in Vanderhoof. Eight other Catholic Elementary schools continue to flourish – the Sacred Heart and St. Mary's in Prince George; Notre Dame in Dawson Creek; St. Joseph's in Smithers, St. Anthony's in Kitimat, Veritas in Terrace and Annunciation in Prince Rupert. In 2001, an official decree changed the canonical status from a missionary diocese and brought it under the Common Law of the Church. Oblates from Ireland together with committed members of the Frontier Apostolate, helped build and develop pastoral centres, churches, schools and colleges and hospitals throughout what was then unchartered.

The Oblates built over twenty-four churches with circa fifteen mission stations within British Columbia. The volunteer effort which was envisaged and planned by Bishop O'Grady – Frontier Apostolate – laid the groundwork for a Catholic community solidarity for spreading the faith.

The success of the Oblate missionaries can be seen to-day in the ordination of Canadian nationals for the priesthood and in the Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver having a population of 477,792 Catholics or 17.8% of the total population. The Diocese of Prince George, having a Catholic population of 59,720 or 21.9% of 273,300. The Diocese of Whitehouse has 9,300 Catholics or 22.1% of the population.

As Father Clenaghan stated:
 'Ideally, the call to the apostolate is not the lone response of the individual lay person acting on his own rather the spirit of the Council. Rather, in accordance the spirit of the Council, it should involve the action of both clergy and parishioners'.

- Catherine Mullan (archivist)
- Photos from K. Nelligan



Connecting in Difficult Times

– Friends of St. Eugene

The world's 'annus horribilis' 2020 is over and now we're in 2021 but none of us know what it will bring. I have to confess it's not looking too promising for a return to normal, though we have the good news of the vaccine roll out. We are all missing connections, not the magazine (though we appreciate the contact), but connecting physically with others, especially if one lives alone.

Like every other group, it has been a problem for the Friends of St Eugene, too, as so much of what we did as Friends involved meeting, praying with each other and working on projects together. None of which has been possible for almost a year or will be, if news reports are to be believed, for the foreseeable future.

Not all our members use social media so contact with some members has been more difficult. It is important to be as inclusive as possible.

That was one reason why we decided to write a FoSE monthly newsletter which is sent or delivered to all members. Some people even manage to chat with each other on doorsteps during the deliveries. It is full of what we hope is interesting, fun and, at times, even newsy items. People have appreciated the effort. As an aside, what a blessing computers, iPads, tablets and mobile / phones have been to many of us in the past year. The letter 'e' on my computer has completely faded and is now merely a white blob.

Many groups have tried to keep in touch through Zoom coffee mornings and What's app phone calls. One group have started a 40 day Lent project on a private Facebook page where they have challenged each other to upload an inspiring photograph and a suitable caption. Yet another group is arranging Taizé prayer afternoon together via a zoom link 'as they did in the old days.'



The Communications team for the Province has done a sterling job throughout the lockdowns. I am delighted to see that many of the members of Friends of St Eugene have gained some notoriety thanks to their inclusion in presenting the Oblate Morning Prayer. They have all done really well.

Friends have adapted their usual activities with their usual enthusiasm. They have collected funds via jungle drums for families in need at Christmas, sent Christmas cards to refugees and prisoners, zoom monthly meetings and when they can, walking together in local areas. See the March calendar girls for a picture of an event in the Summer - the same is done now but only with one person, no coffee and in boots and big coats.

While the churches have been open, FRIENDS have been involved as church stewards and cleaning churches after services which is greatly appreciated by clergy and parishioners.

For now we can only hold each other in prayer till we can meet again and continue to chat to and look out for each other. We remember especially the Friends who work in the caring professions or those who live in Care homes who have faced this virus at first hand.

– Mary Tyrell

Oblate Mission Shop

www.oblates.ie/mission-shop

Easter Novena Mass Cards

You can now obtain Easter Cards and other items online from the Oblate Mission Shop. The suggested donation for each card is €3.00 and your donation will help fund Oblate Missions.

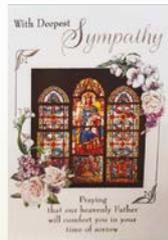


€3.00
order online

Mass Cards for the Deceased



Perpetual Mass Card



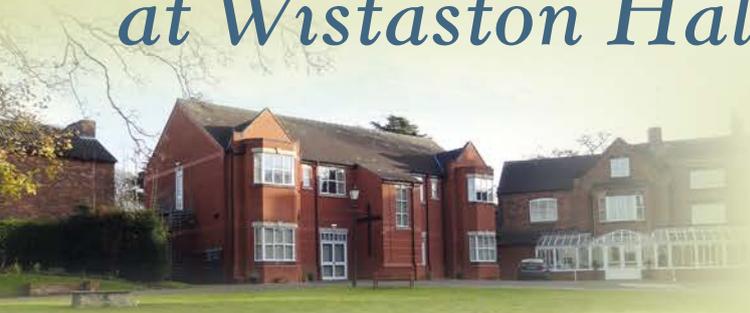
Single Mass Card

€1.95 Post and packaging per order

€4.00
order online



Upcoming Events at Wistaston Hall



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

Icon Workshop

27th – 31st July 2021 £300.00 per person
Led by Sabeesh Jacob, CMI

There is an increasing interest in the immense spiritual potential of art in our society as symbols and images unite people and enhance spiritual connectedness and communication. In the Catholic Church, as in major Christian denominations, the tradition of icons is undergoing a revival as it promotes a contemplative approach to prayer and spiritual experience. This retreat will offer reflections that inform, inspire and invite interested 'seekers' and faithful on a journey through the image and beauty of the icon. Besides providing biblical and historical insights on the development of the icon, the retreat will guide the participants through the processes of writing, meditating, and venerating an icon.

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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