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Please Take One

Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.33, 8th December, 2016

John Pichappilly in *The Table of the Lord*; tells the following story, “There was this very strong woodcutter who asked for a job with a timber merchant and got it. The wages the timber merchant paid were really good and so were the work conditions. For that reason the woodcutter was determined to do his best. His boss gave him an axe and showed him the area where he was supposed to work. The first day the woodcutter brought 18 trees. “Congratulations’ the boss said “go on that way.” Very motivated by the words of the boss, the woodcutter tried harder the next day, but he could only bring 15 trees. The third day he tried even harder but brought only 10 trees. Day after day he was bringing less and less trees. “I must be losing my strength,” the woodcutter thought. He went to the boss and apologized, saying he could not understand what was going on. “When was the last time you sharpened your axe? The boss asked. “Sharpen? I had no time to sharpen my axe. I have been very busy trying to cut trees..”

At this time of the year it is very easy to be busy with so many things. Yet like the axe that needs sharpening, we also need to sharpen our spiritual lives.

At the start of Advent this year Pope Francis said, “we are called to enlarge the horizons of our hearts, to be surprised by the life that is presented each day with its newness. In order to do this we need to learn to not depend on our own securities, our own established plans, because the Lord comes in the hour which we don’t imagine.”

Let us try to sharpen our spirit this Advent season by becoming more loving, more prayerful, more compassionate, more generous and more faithful. In this way may we be surprised by the gift of Life itself which we will celebrate at Christmas.

Advent is God’s marvelous gift to all of us. I pray that we will each take time to allow this season unfold slowly and gently for us.
- Fr. Lorcán O’Reilly OMI

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The Meaning of Christmas

– *Connecting the Dots between the Crib and the Cross*

– *Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI*

“Joy is the meaning of Christmas. Our carols have it right. At Christmas, God gives us a special permission to be happy.”

The Gospel stories about the birth of Jesus are not a simple retelling of the events that took place then, at the stable in Bethlehem. In his commentaries on the birth of Jesus, the renowned scripture scholar, Raymond Brown, highlights that these narratives were written long after Jesus had already been crucified and had risen from the dead and that they are coloured by what his death and resurrection mean. At one level, they are as much stories about Jesus’ passion and death as they are about his birth. When the Gospel writers looked back at the birth of Jesus through the prism of the resurrection they saw in his birth already the pattern for both his active ministry and his death and resurrection: God comes into the world and some believe and accept him and others hate and reject him. For some, his person gives meaning, for others it causes confusion and anger. There is an adult message about Christ in Christmas and the meaning of Christmas is to be understood as much by looking at the cross as by looking at the crib. Hardly the stuff of our Christmas lights, carols, cribs, and Santa.

And yet, these too have their place. Karl Rahner, not naïve to what Raymond Brown asserts, argues that, even so, Christmas is still about happiness and the simple joy of children captures the meaning of Christmas more accurately than any adult cynicism. At Christmas, Rahner contends, God gives us a special permission to be happy: “Do not be afraid to be happy, for ever since I [God] wept, joy is the standard of living that is really more suitable than the anxiety and grief of those who think they have no hope. ...I no longer go away from the world, even if you do not see me now. ...I am there. It is Christmas. Light the candles. They have more right to exist than all the darkness. It is Christmas. Christmas that lasts forever.” At Christmas, the crib trumps the cross, even as the cross does not fully disappear.

How do the cross and the crib fit together? Does Calvary cast a permanent shadow on Bethlehem? Should Christmas disturb us more than console us? Is our simple joy at Christmas somehow missing the real point?

No. Joy is the meaning of Christmas. Our carols have it right. At Christmas, God gives us a special permission to be happy, though that must be carefully understood. There is no innate contradiction between joy and suffering, between being happy and undergoing all the pain that life hands us. Joy is not to be identified with pleasure and with the absence of suffering in our lives. Genuine joy is a constant that remains with us throughout all of our experiences in life, including our pain and suffering. Jesus promised us “a joy that no one can take away from you”. Clearly that means something that doesn’t disappear because we get sick, have a loved one die, are betrayed by a spouse, lose our job, are rejected by a friend, are subject to physical pain, or are enduring emotional distress. None of us will escape pain and suffering. Joy must be able to co-exist with these. Indeed it is meant to grow deeper through the experiences of pain and suffering. We are meant to be women and men of joy, even as we live in pain. That’s a colouring, taken from their understanding of Jesus’ death and resurrection, which the Gospel writers insert into their narratives about his birth.

But, of course, that is not what children see when they get caught up in the excitement of Christmas and when they look at the Christ-child in the crib. Their joy is still innocent, healthily protected by their naiveté, still awaiting disillusion, but real nonetheless. The naïve joy of a child is real and the temptation to rewrite and recolor it in light of the disillusionment of later years is wrong. What was real was real. The fond memories we have of anticipating and celebrating Christmas as children are not invalidated when Santa has been deconstructed. Christmas invites us still, as John Shea poetically puts it, “to plunge headlong into the pudding.” And despite all the disillusionment within our adult lives, Christmas still offers us, depressed adults, that wonderful invitation.

Even when we no longer believe in Santa, and all the cribs, lights, carols, cards, colorful wrapping-paper, and gifts of Christmas no longer bring the same thrill, the same invitation still remains: Christmas invites us to be happy, and that demands of us an elemental asceticism, a fasting from adult cynicism, a discipline of joy that can hold the cross and the crib together so as to be able to live in a joy that no one, and no tragedy, can take from us. This will allow us, at Christmas, like children, to plunge headlong into the pudding. Christmas gives, both children and adults, permission to be happy.



My Snapshot of the 36th General Chapter

– Ray Warren, OMI (Provincial)

I had the privilege of attending the 36th General Chapter of the Oblate Congregation. The experience was truly Congregational, international, inter-cultural and inter-generational. We were also marking our 200th Anniversary of Foundation.

The principal tasks of the General Chapter as stated in our Constitutions and Rules is;

“...to strengthen the bonds of unity and to express the members’ participation in the life of the Congregation... Together, in union with the Church, we discern God’s will in the urgent needs of our times and we thank the Lord for the work of salvation which he accomplishes through us”. Cc 125

“The General Chapter elects the Superior General and his Council, articulates our missionary vision, determines general policy for the Congregation, and makes whatever decisions is required...” Cc 126

The Chapter began with the celebration of the Eucharist and the procession of the assembly into the Chapter Hall where we each had to answer the roll call. The first week was spent principally in a listening attitude as the presentations of reports from the Regions of the Oblate world. Our prayer was focused on the first theme from the Year of Mercy; looking at the past with Gratitude. Perhaps the most striking accounts that I heard was in the pain expressed from the Oblates living constantly in a state of tension and fear in the zones of war and conflict.

Each day we lived as a community, our lives revolving around prayer, work and building up our relationships. The Eucharist formed the centre of each day and our evening prayer and silent adoration (Oraison) together concluded the working schedule for each day.

The second week began with the Superior General’s report on the state of the Congregation. This is a major document that maps the past six years in the life of the Congregation. It is a strong, clear and honest appraisal of the state of the Congregation. He acknowledged missionary spirit evident throughout the Congregation but also named the dysfunctions and serious challenges that exist.



“This report contains many challenges we face and yet, there is immense hope for our mission to be renewed and for each of us to become missionaries who leave nothing undared for the Kingdom of Christ.

I believe the work of the Holy Spirit among the members of the General Chapter will ignite not only a desire for a radical living of our charism to preach the Gospel to the poor in their many faces, but concrete ways to move toward this. We pray that the effect of this General Chapter will shake us up and incite a new impulse of creative missionary zeal. In the spirit of Saint Eugene I expect this General Chapter to bring us closer to the poor and impel us to live out more faithfully our consecration as men who live in apostolic communities marked by prayer, a simple life style and joy.”

Considering this report along with all the previous regional reports, we began to discern our future. We also began discerning the urgent needs and articulating our missionary vision for the next six years firstly by identifying the context, the questions, the problems and concerns. We considered the resources such as the scripture basis, Church documents, Oblate texts, and we discerned as best we could the present calls to mission today. We then considered strategies at the local, regional and congregational levels to respond to our mission. Finally we tried to draw any links between each area.



We identified our missionary vision in six focus areas; Mission with:

1. The New Faces of the Poor
2. Youth
3. Formation
4. Interculturality
5. Social Media
6. Finance.

You might ask where is our commitment to the laity? The Chapter recognised that in each of the six focus areas that the mission with the laity is intricate.

We also endorsed a proposal that the new General Administration prepare for a Lay international Oblate Congress within its remit.

Our prayer for this week was a reflection on the second theme of the Year of Mercy; live the present with Passion. We were presented with a copy of the new OMI Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation document “Companions on Mission”. JPIC was a recurring theme that was picked up in so much of our discussions.

We continued through the third week developing the emerging issues for Oblate mission and of finding ways to respond. Our prayer followed the third theme of the Year of Mercy; Embrace the future with hope. This was also the week in which we entered into a time of retreat and personal sharing in preparation for the election of the Superior General and Council. The audience with Pope Francis was a special moment for all.

What the Pope said to us:

“The fraternal experience of prayer, confrontation, and communitarian discernment should be a stimulus for a new missionary drive towards the poor and most abandoned... the Church and the world is going through



an epochal change, expanding ever more the field and scope of the Church’s mission of evangelization.

The Church needs men who carry in their hearts the love of Jesus Christ, which permeated the heart of the young Eugene de Mazenod, and the same unconditional love for the Church, which seeks to be a house ever more open. It is important to toil for a Church for all, ready to welcome and accompany! To this end, ‘adequate, evangelical, and courageous responses must be sought to the personal questioning of the men and women of today’.

Pope Francis then provided a key with which to live the missionary life:

“Look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, and embrace the future with hope, without becoming discouraged by the difficulties you encounter in the mission but rather be strengthened by faithfulness to your religious and missionary vocation”.

The final week was spent on voting on amendments to the Constitutions and Rules, the adoption of recommendations relating to the Safeguarding of Minors and vulnerable persons, financial responsibilities, restructuring within the Congregation and the establishment of a General Mission committee.

In all of this busy month, I did find time to sit with many of my brothers and share together the struggles and joys of our religious life. The atmosphere was never contrived or strained but a genuine joyful and honest family gathering.

A document will be published soon that will offer a direction for the Congregation for the future based on the six focus areas that emerged during our discussions.



The Friends of St Eugene – Amlwch

Ffrindiau Sant Eugene Prayer-Friendship-Service

“A lot of Christians have it in them to do all kinds of good works that they will never perhaps carry out unless... someone... invites them to get to work...” – Eugene de Mazenod

Anglesey Centre of Mission

Oblate Provincial Fr Ray Warren presided over the Mass of Commitment for ten Friends of St Eugene from the Anglesey Centre of Mission on November 13th 2016 in the Church of Our Lady Star of the Sea in Amlwch. This brings the total number of Friends on Anglesey to twenty-eight.

We asked some of the group what being a Friend of St Eugene means to them.

Below are some of their reflections:

I enjoy going around my local community to see that my neighbours have someone to speak to most days. I also take holy communion to the housebound. I take this to be fellowship. I myself also like the contact with the other friends who feel the same as myself. We help to look after each other.

– Noreen - Amlwch

First of all, the Friends of St. Eugene is like belonging to a family of faith that encompasses our locality and reaches out to the whole global sphere. It gives a focus and support to our activities. It also makes us more aware of situations in other parts of the country. The needs of the cities, urban, and rural areas are all different, but the teachings of St. Eugene show us how to apply the same approach. The spirit of the Oblate charism encourages us in our communities and strengthens our networks. The guidance of the present day Oblate community of priests motivates our mission. The groups give love to each other and help when in difficulties.

– Irene - Amlwch

Being a Friend of St Eugene means being part of a family of like-minded people who want to live a kind-hearted, Christian way of life and be considerate of others. A way of life led by Jesus and St Eugene.

– Moira - Amlwch

It started as something to do on a Saturday once a month to hopefully make me a better person for myself and to others. As a Friend of St Eugene I now feel that's possible.

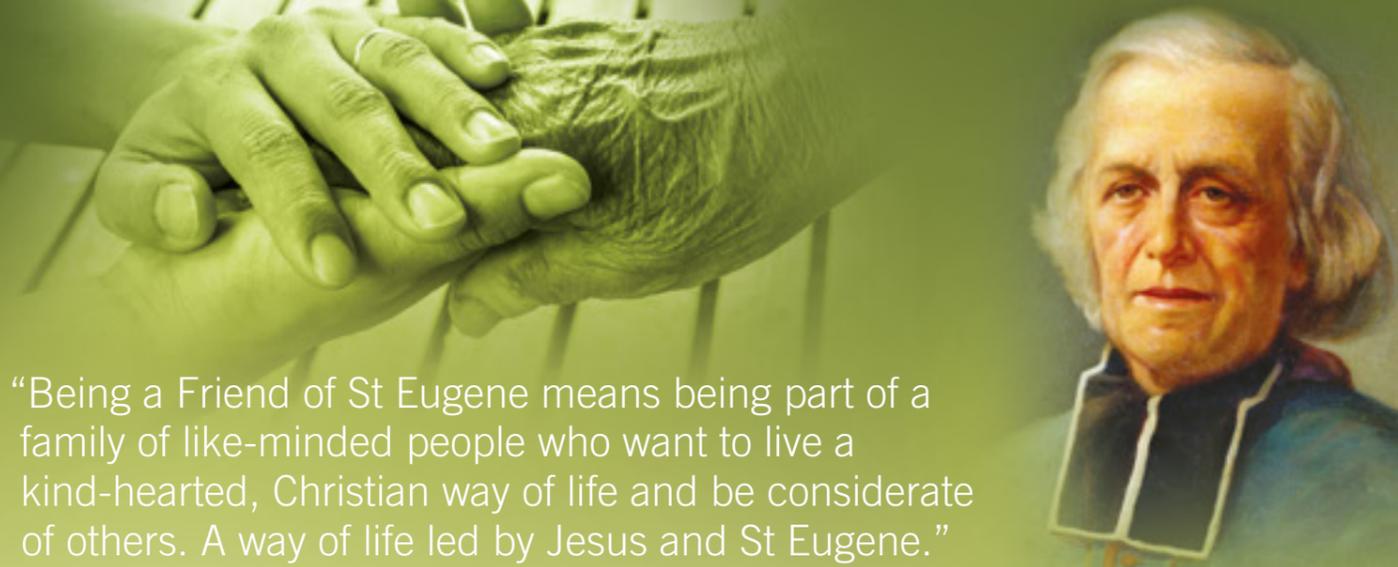
– Pauline - Amlwch

Finding out and hearing more about the charism of St Eugene has inspired me to be more aware of what is around me. It has opened my world; I look and listen more. Who are the poor in our community? The lonely, hungry, homeless, housebound and I am sure that you can all add to this list. For me it's about someone needing a hello, a smile, a chat, and a visit. As a Friend of St Eugene I help out at the local Food bank and visit a lady who is housebound. St Eugene has given me the confidence to express my faith more openly in public.

– Bernadette - Holyhead

I enjoy the monthly meetings – the friendship and the sharing. Also the 15 Days of Prayer with St Eugene. I appreciate St Eugene's deep spirituality and option for the poor; an extraordinary man.

– Sylvia - Holyhead



“Being a Friend of St Eugene means being part of a family of like-minded people who want to live a kind-hearted, Christian way of life and be considerate of others. A way of life led by Jesus and St Eugene.”

St Eugene pointed the way to what we, as Friends of St Eugene, should do in our lives. He wants us to reach out to the ones on the margins of society: the outcasts, the elderly, the friendless and the lonely. When I was invited to join the Friends of St Eugene I thought that this was the way forward. In our group we experience friendship and cooperation and can serve others in our community in a better way than on our own. As I get older there are still ways where I can help someone even if it is just a smile or a word or two. We have St Eugene's wonderful example – his charism, his energy and determination to spread the Good News of Jesus to all. Jesus' love is for everyone whatever his or her circumstances. As a Friend of St Eugene I endeavor to carry out 'to serve, not to be served'.

– Pat O'Connor - Holyhead

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate have been the religious Order of priests that have been ministering in my parish of Holyhead for a long time before I was born. As I grew up I came to know a little bit about Bishop de Mazenod – or St Eugene as he now is. The little I knew of him came from various liturgies in Church to do with him – which century he lived in, where he was from, the Religious Congregation he founded etc. And living in an Oblate Parish I was mildly aware of how important he was to the priests of The Oblates of Mary Immaculate who minister on the Island of Anglesey.

But all that has changed. I have been a member of the group called The Friends of St Eugene for nearly 15 months, and it is only now that I feel I can call myself a friend of St Eugene.



The Camino de Santiago

An Easter Pilgrimage in 2017

This year, why not make your Easter a journey of faith – a pilgrimage? Join a small group of Oblate pilgrims from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales as we set out to walk the final 135km of the ancient Camino route through northern Spain, arriving in Santiago de Compostela just in time for Easter Sunday Mass in the beautiful Cathedral. Celebrate the Triduum along the Way, in beautiful, intimate surroundings.

Dates: 10th-18th April 2017
Cost: £450pp (Half board, ex London)

For more information please contact:
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Being a member of The Friends of St Eugene has made me realise just how important a figure he was in the Church in the 19th century. How he championed the causes of those who were poor and destitute – and the least in society – both as a young priest in Aix en Provence and again when he was Bishop of France's second city, Marseille. And secondly, through his Congregation, how the Oblate Priests and Brothers brought that same message to places all over the world. I have felt inspired when I have heard this history – of stories of the Oblates living among the native peoples in the freezing cold of Canada to the heat of some African countries. And of how the Oblates came to Britain in the 19th Century – mainly to the slum areas of cities where the poor lived out their existence. And here on Anglesey I am thankful that the spirit of St Eugene, working through the combination of our two Oblate priests in partnership with the lay people of our 8 Faith Communities, is still alive and strong in bringing the good news of the Gospel to all.

I am aware of diminishing numbers but thank God that they are empowering us parishioners to take responsibility for the good order of our parishes and helping us to live and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.
– Helen - Holyhead

Our Advent Service

This Advent the Anglesey groups are supporting the Action by Christians Against Torture (ACAT UK) Christmas Card campaign. They will be encouraging parishioners, friends and family to send Christmas cards to political prisoners in all parts of the world who have been imprisoned because of their Christian faith or work as human rights activists.

Whoever tortures a human being,
whoever abuses a human being,
whoever outrages a human being,
abuses God's image,
and the Church takes as its own,
that cross, that martyrdom.
(Archbishop Oscar Romero)

We are all ministers of the Mercy of God

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

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A very difficult situation in Venezuela

These are comments to Father Javier ÁLVAREZ LODEIRO, superior of the OMI Mission, made a few weeks prior to the October 24, 2016, after an announcement that the Holy See will try to act as mediator in the process of searching for a lasting peace in that conflicted country. Because the situation is so volatile, things could change day by day. This is the testimony of an Oblate on the scene and it tells of the tensions and the difficulties our Oblates there face each day.

Waiting and discouragement. These two words could define the situation in Venezuela, given the rapid worsening of the situation. In less than a year, we are living an enormous crisis, already foreseen, but now present in every home. Food is scarce; it is difficult to find any and on top of that, the prices are exorbitant. If in 2012, a kilo of Cachama (a river fish) cost 20 bolivar, in 2014, it reached 200. At the end of 2015, it was going for 800 and today, this typical product of my area costs 2000 bolivar per kilo. If we consider that the minimum wage is 15,000 bolivar, one can well imagine the situation. Furthermore, medications for the most common illnesses are lacking, not to mention the more serious cases. Illnesses become worse because of a lack of medicine. Everything is becoming difficult. And the worst is yet to come.

Looting is a forerunner of societal collapse that, thanks be to God, for now has not shown its face. In some places there has been looting and clashes with the military: from Cumanà, recently we have had reports of repression after the looting that devastated the city. The media do not report it, but fellow priests speak of many deaths. They arrested more than 400 people, crowded for days in a shed, without water or a bathroom...

In the midst of discouragement in the face of an untenable situation, the only hope is a change of government through a referendum, to be accomplished

before the end of 2016, because if they do it in 2017, the government would pass into the hands of the vice-president and nothing would change. If we miss this occasion, the pressure cooker which is Venezuelan society would explode, with a trail of pain and violence, in a country where the murder rate is higher than in any other country, including Afghanistan.

Our communities are found in different areas. In Santa Barbara, we live in a rural village and that resolves in part the food problem, thanks to being in the country. San Cristobal is near places where there are vegetable farms, and from those, in general, you can get something. The situation of the community in Catia is more serious: they lack food and water and they do not have access to the sources of produce. Furthermore, the crime level is greater in the areas near Caracas, considered the most violent city in the world.

The Oblates are committed to being with these people, helping them to overcome the general discouragement and offering them hope and faith in the Lord who walks with his people. We are not in a grave situation, although we suffer with the neediest, victims of a great lack of food. But the shadow of a societal explosion that would have unforeseeable consequences is already on the horizon. What happens next will be determining in this long agony of the country.



Water & Education For Africa

I have been travelling to Zimbabwe for quite a while now, coordinating the annual Oblate Missionary Experience. I have been privileged to visit this incredible country 9 times in the past 7 years. I have been lucky enough to be able to bring volunteers to work in the Sandra Jones Children's Village, and to see the impact these men and women have had on the lives of the children there. I have watched many of the kids grow up.

I have also been able to spend time in Lupane, visiting outstations deep in the bush, all being ministered to by the Oblate mission in St Luke's. I have worked for several years with Dr Brendan Ratcliffe who has spent months at a time in the bush, travelling to the remote villages, educating the local people on things like nutrition and hygiene, while delivering life-saving jars of peanut butter to help the starving children.

And as we got to know the local communities better, we asked them what they needed. The reply was always the same: Water. We need water. Zimbabwe has, for many years now, experienced complete drought. The people are forced to drink unclean, untreated water, which leads to diarrhoea. Crops fail and livestock die, which leads to starvation and malnutrition. Water is available, however. The only catch is that it lies deep underground, in a massive aquifer stretching down from the Okavango Delta in Botswana. This water can be anywhere from 20 to 60 metres deep, which makes it expensive to access. To drill a borehole and fit a reliable pump costs between \$8000 and \$10,000 USD- an impossible dream for these communities.

So, in November last year, Brendan and I met with a group of volunteers who had also spent time in Zimbabwe on the Missionary Experience. These volunteers had spent time in the Sandra Jones Centre, and had seen first-hand the conditions endured by the people in the rural communities. They had heard the villagers articulate their need for water. They had seen the children walk for miles each day to fill grubby plastic containers with muddy water. They wanted to help.

And so, WEFA was born: Water and Education for Africa. Our aim was simple: we hoped to fundraise enough money to drill at least 10 boreholes in Zimbabwe over the next 5 years. We were also committed to sending at least 5 young girls to school per year in the same period- now they didn't have to spend 3 or 4 hours a day fetching water for the family, many young girls would now have the time to go to school, if not the money.

In February this year, we were given the opportunity to speak about our dream in Oblate parishes on Anglesey. The response was immediate, and amazing. The 8 Catholic faith communities on the island adopted WEFA, and over the next few months raised a staggering £9000, putting us in the position that we were now able to drill a borehole in August. (This would be our second time drilling a borehole, having received an anonymous donation the year before, allowing us to see if what we were planning was even possible. That attempt resulted in the successful drilling of a borehole in Bhomela, about 100km from St Luke's.)



The communities of Siziphile and Bhomela have been transformed by access to water, a right which we take for granted. They have clean, safe water to drink. They are able to cultivate crops, ensuring good, nutritious food.

Although the drilling process wouldn't happen for another 6 months, the work began almost straight away. We began working with Fr Jeffrey Madondo OMI, parish priest of St Luke's, to identify those communities in most need. He suggested a rural village, Siziphile, and began the consultation process with the parish council. They worked to secure the permits needed to drill the borehole, which would hopefully be located on the 1-acre plot recently granted to them by the Rural District Council on which to build a new Catholic church. They fenced the plot, and began to build the church. They cleared more land, ready to begin planting a community garden as soon as the borehole was drilled.

In June, my wife Helen and I visited Siziphile to continue the consultation. There were about a dozen women waiting for us when we finally pulled off the dusty track into the church stand. About half an acre of bush had been cleared, and a fence erected. In the corner of the stand, 3 men were working on the new church building, in the traditional 'pole and dagga' fashion. The bricks were mud, packed into paint cans and shaped, then left to dry in the sun. Everything used to build the church was sourced from within a few dozen feet of where we stood.

As Helen and I got out of the car, the women broke into song, and came to greet us. With Fr Jeffrey interpreting, they gave us a tour of the stand, and

spoke enthusiastically about their plans for the future, and how the food produced would provide sustenance and hopefully an income for their community. Over the course of the meeting, it became clear just how organized this community was, and how committed they were to their future, deep in the bush.

Preparations would continue until Brendan and I returned to Zimbabwe in late August. The next step was the most nerve-wracking- a survey to see if there was actually water in the area. To do that, we needed the expertise of Mr Lyndon Greenland. It was 6 o'clock in the morning, and the day was already warm when Lyndon joined us in the car. He carried with him the tools of his trade- a willow rod and 2 copper wires, to divine for water on the plot.

St Luke's was a 2 and a half hour drive, with Siziphile a further 40 minutes away. After a brief stop with Fr Jeffrey in St Luke's Mission House, we set off on our journey to Siziphile. It took a lot more than 40 minutes. Lyndon knew of 2 boreholes in the area, both around 7-10km from where we planned to drill. He demanded that we inspect them both before we got to the church stand. As we drove, he took in every feature of the landscape, making comments on the colour of the dust, the size of the rocks, types of trees, and every hill or dip in the earth that we passed.



“A Traveling Salesman for Christ.”

Since his ordination in 1985, Fr. Marek Stroba, OMI has taken the Word of God from his native Poland to small villages in Africa, farming communities and inner cities in the United States, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Tijuana, Mexico and currently to multicultural parishes in San Fernando, California.

Born in 1955 in Katowice, Poland Fr. Marek grew up in an environment where the Catholic Church was persecuted by the Communist government. He dreamed about being a missionary in a foreign land. That dream came true when he was assigned to help with the formation of catechists in Cameroon. “I’ve always been interested in working in the missions, and that interest has taken me to many wonderful and diverse places,” said Fr. Marek.

In 1985 Fr. Marek became the first Oblate from Poland to be assigned to work in the United States. His ministries in America could not have been more diverse. He accepted assignments in both rural and urban settings.

Rural assignments included International Falls, Minnesota known as America’s icebox for its harsh winters. In Sisseton, South Dakota he worked with Native Americans on a reservation. In Ava, Missouri he was a small town Catholic priest in the heart of the Bible Belt. Urban assignments came with different challenges. At Precious Blood Parish in Chicago, Fr. Marek routinely ministered to residents in the violent Cabrini housing projects. At times he would be the calming influence between rival gang members. At St. Mary’s Parish in St. Paul, Minnesota his parishioners ranged from residents at a nearby homeless shelter to wealthy businessmen from the suburbs. Assignments in Miami and throughout Texas allowed Fr. Marek to minister in Hispanic neighborhoods with their rich traditions and culture.

“I have been blessed to work with people from different races and different cultures,” said Fr. Marek. “So much of my energy has been spent trying to promote integration.” Helping Fr. Marek in these diverse ministries is his incredible gift of language. He can hold conversations in Polish, English, Spanish, French, Italian, German and Russian.



For three years most of those conversations were in Spanish. He was part of a team of Oblates working at the La Morita mission in Tijuana, Mexico. The mission is extensive, serving an area of about 200,000 people. At the main parish, St. Eugene de Mazenod, there is a medical clinic that provides many of the poorest residents with their only access to healthcare. The parish also has 15 neighborhood chapels. “The chapels are very simple and modest,” said Fr. Marek, noting that most are made of discarded building materials. “Sometimes when we got a real heavy rain the entire chapel would get washed away.”

Father Marek said he is living proof that – the more things change, the more they stay the same. His work in Cameroon and Mexico are separated by 30 years and thousands of miles, but both consist primarily of the same form of evangelization, gathering people together amid their poverty and sharing the Good News in the humblest of settings.

A few months ago the Oblates were in need of help at their three parishes near Los Angeles. So Fr. Marek left Tijuana and headed north. He is expected to minister in California a few months before being assigned a more long-term ministry. When that call comes, Fr. Marek will be ready, gathering up a few personal belongings and heading to a new mission territory. It’s the vagabond life that Fr. Marek has chosen and loves – to be the traveling salesman for Christ.
– Mike Viola

Finding the components of the mechanical bush pump proved difficult due to the very difficult trading climate in Zimbabwe. However, Mr Greenland, once again proved invaluable in locating supplies in the old industrial areas of Bulawayo. A bush pump was successfully transported to the well site on September 3rd. However, silt had accumulated in the borehole. It was necessary to flush out the borehole prior to fitting the pump. The pump was successfully installed on September 10th and a good water flow was achieved.

The communities of Sizophile and Bhomela have been transformed by access to water, a right which we take for granted. They have clean, safe water to drink. They are able to cultivate crops, ensuring good, nutritious food, and the potential to sell any excess for a few dollars profit. The women are empowered, the children healthy.

Many people in the Anglo-Irish Province have been incredibly generous to WEFA with their money and their time, especially the communities on Anglesey. Already we have almost enough money to return next year and drill another borehole for another community in need. On behalf of WEFA, and on behalf of the Zimbabwean communities whose lives have been immeasurably changed by the gift of water, Thank You.
– Ronan Lavery

Almost 3 hours later we reached Sizophile. As we pulled into the stand, the women were there once again, cheering and singing as we got out of the car. The walls of the church had been finished by then, and the roof was almost complete, just waiting for thatch. After a long greeting, Lyndon called for us to begin with a prayer. Heads bowed, we all stood in a circle in the strong sun, praying that we would find water. It was a heartfelt prayer, and a very powerful moment for me.

Lyndon stood in the centre of the stand for a long time, looking around. Near and far, he took in every aspect of the landscape. He examined the sand underfoot, the shrubbery, the trees. Then he began to divine. It was a surreal experience, but a surprisingly quick one. Within 10 minutes, he began hammering a stick into the ground, announcing that we would strike water right here! We shared another prayer with the ladies, and headed back to Bulawayo. I was flying home in a couple of days, so I would miss the actual drilling. I would eventually hear all about it from Brendan over a crackly phone line.

Brendan:
A local drilling company was contracted and the drill rig was dispatched on Tuesday 30th August. Access to the site was difficult due to the sandy nature of the area and a local tractor was required to gain access to the site. Drilling revealed mudstone overlying sandstone, typical of the general area. We were successful at locating water at 43m and drilled to a depth of 65m. The well was then capped awaiting pump installation.



Realising a Dream

While it is not rare that some Oblate missionaries eventually assume citizenship in the country where they are preaching the Good News, Fr. Vincenzo BORDO, a native of Italy, speaks eloquently here of his own feelings as he assumed a new “identity” and a new name as a citizen of Korea.

The great dream of a missionary is to go to a far-off country, to live as the people live, to speak their language, to dress as they do, to eat the same food, to study and to appreciate their culture, and with humility and dedication, to serve the poor in that nation. To become like them and to become one of them. And then to rest in peace in that corner of the world.



Looking back at my life, on the threshold of turning 60, I think I can say that, thanks to Jesus, so many of these dreams have come true. I live in a country that I love and appreciate and I work for the poor. I speak their language; I share the same meals; I dress like them. And perhaps because of this, the Government, seeing this sincere, long and arduous journey of sharing, decided, by a presidential decree, to honor me with Korean citizenship. During the ceremony of handing over the passport, after I made the oath of allegiance to the Republic, when the Minister handed me the flag of Korea, sweet tears of joy fell from my eyes. Yes, now I am in fact a Korean citizen. My dream has come true.

So, when you come here and you wish to see me, do not look for Vincenzo Bordo, because this person is no longer in the Korean registry. Instead, look for KIM HA JONG. In the documents, this is my new name. “Kim” is the surname of the first Korean priest. He was a wonderful young man, in love with life, with God and with his people. He died a martyr when only 24 years old! “Ha Jong” means “Servant of God.”

Yes, following in the footsteps of Jesus, I learned to choose the poor and to be a servant of these destitute brothers and sisters. So that little dream of a young boy has turned into a beautiful mission of brotherhood and friendship between two peoples: Italy and Korea. They are nations that were able to meet one another, to get to know and esteem one another in the richness of their ancient cultures, thanks to that tiny, fragile and wobbly bamboo bridge that I too helped build.

Over these years I have also learned that the fears of the new are simply excuses to mask our petty selfishness, hidden behind legitimate claims of security. That the mistrust of others is just a phantom, due to stupid ignorance and the presumptuous arrogance of those who have nothing to learn.

Meanwhile, I have realized that a life of welcoming, listening, sharing and of dialogue leads to broaden the mind to new and wonderful knowledge; the spirit to infinite horizons and it opens our hearts to incredible sensations never before felt. That which is different is not a threat but rather an unfathomable richness.

Now I’m getting ready to fashion the last piece of this great mosaic that has been my life in the Orient: to rest in peace among the rolling hills and beautiful forests of this nation. And to do that, I have enrolled as an organ donor. That will be, whenever God wishes, the last piece of the enchanting DREAM which the Lord has made in this corner of the world.

– Fr. Kim Ha Jong Vincenzo



Father Vincenzo Bordo (left) after the ceremony of handing over the certificate of Korean nationality on 19 November 2015.

Subscribe to the Oblate Pools and Support the Oblate Missions

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

You can also subscribe online: www.oblates.ie
All proceeds from the Oblate Pools is used to support the work of the Oblate Mission throughout the world.





Pope Francis Proposes New Beatitudes Linking JPIC, Evangelization and Ecumenism

After his ecumenical celebration with Lutherans in Lund, Sweden, on Oct. 31, Pope Francis celebrated Mass for All Saints Day in nearby Malmo. During his homily on the Beatitudes, he proposed six new Beatitudes. Notice how they link together the various dimensions of our Catholic Faith:

- Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others and forgive them from their heart.
- Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalized and show them their closeness.
- Blessed are those who see God in every person and strive to make others also discover him.
- Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home.

- Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others.
- Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians.

Pope Francis observed that new situations require new energy and new commitment.

In one of the early translations after Vatican II, of the Scriptures into English for proclamation at Mass, the beatitudes became the “happytudes”: Happy are those, etc. As we work for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation with other Christians, may we share more blessedness, happiness and joy!

- Fr. Harry Winter, OMI

Wistaston Hall Events

Individually Guided Retreats

An Individually Guided Retreat is a very special experience providing the opportunity for a person to explore and deepen their personal relationship with God.

An Individually Guided Retreat is undertaken in silence, a silence which allows the retreatant to find an inner stillness which better enables the person to hear God speak to them: “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

In this inner journey the retreatant is guided by a trained Spiritual Director. Each day the retreatant meets their director and is invited to share, in so far as they want to, their prayer experience. The director will suggest passages of Scripture which might help the retreatant in their personal journey with God.

Retreat dates:

Monday January 9th – Sunday January 15th,
7 days cost: £372

Monday January 9th – Friday January 13th,
5 days cost: £248

Friday January 13th – Sunday January 15th,
2 days cost: £124

Monday February 13th – Friday February 17th,
5 days cost: £248

Day of Reflection

We invite you to ‘come away to a quiet place, where you can find rest’. During 2017 we will have 6 individual days of Reflection. Each day will begin at 9.30am with tea/coffee and conclude in the afternoon at 3.30pm. In order to keep costs as low as possible you are invited to bring your own packed lunch. Refreshments will be provided. Cost: £5.00

The day will include an input session, time for personal reflection, an opportunity to talk one-to-one with a trained Spiritual Director, Eucharist.

Each of the six days can be attended as ‘stand alone’ events but you might consider coming along to all of them. Doing this enables you to journey with the Lord right through 2017 in a prayerful and reflective way.

Six Days Are: Saturday 28th January, Saturday March 4th, Saturday May 6th, Saturday June 10th, Saturday October 7th, Saturday November 4th.

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

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89 Broughton Lane, Crewe, Cheshire, CW2 8JS

Tel: +44 (0) 1270 568 653 or

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