



Missionary Oblates
– Always Close to the People

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Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.47, 21st May, 2020

I would like to introduce this special edition of Connections with the words of Pope Francis as I believe they capture an important message for all of us in the present moment.

Dear brothers and sisters, in the time of trial that we are presently undergoing with our fears and our doubts, have experienced our frailty. We need the Lord, who sees beyond that frailty an irrepressible beauty. With him we rediscover how precious we are even in our vulnerability. We discover that we are like beautiful crystals, fragile and at the same time precious. And if, like crystal, we are transparent before him, his light – the light of mercy – will shine in us and through us in the world.

Mercy does not abandon those who stay behind. Now, while we are looking forward to a slow and arduous recovery from the pandemic, there is a danger that we will forget those who are left behind. The risk is that we may then be struck by an even worse virus, that of selfish indifference. A virus spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me, and that everything will be fine if it is fine for me. It begins there and ends up selecting one person over another, discarding the poor, and sacrificing those left behind on the altar of progress.

The present pandemic, however, reminds us that there are no differences or borders between those who suffer. We are all frail, all equal, all precious. May we be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us: the time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family! Let us learn from the early Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles. It received mercy and lived with mercy: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). This is not some ideology: it is Christianity.

During this time we have seen so many examples of people’s generosity and care for each other. We have been inspired by the many people who are putting themselves in harms way to treat and care for others in the midst of the pandemic. We also continue to pray for those who are ill or who have lost loved ones. As Christians we believe that Good Friday does lead to Easter Sunday and the mystery of the resurrection. So as we look to the future let us remember those words spoken by Jesus “Do not be afraid.”

– Fr. Lorcán O’Reilly OMI

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Huge Stones and

– Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Soren Kierkegaard once wrote that the Gospel text he strongly identified with is the account of the disciples, after the death of Jesus, locking themselves into an upper room in fear and then experiencing Jesus coming through the locked doors to bestow peace on them. Kierkegaard wanted Jesus to do that for him, to come through his locked doors, his resistance, and breathe peace inside him.

That image of locked doors is one of two particularly interesting images inside the story of the first Easter. The other is the image of the “large stone” that entombed the buried Jesus. These images remind us of what often separates us from the grace of the resurrection. Sometimes for that grace to find us, someone must “roll away the stone” that entombs us and sometimes the resurrection must come to us “through locked doors”.

First, about the “stone”:

The Gospels tell us that early on Easter morning three women were on their way to the tomb of Jesus intending to embalm his body with spices but they were anxious about how they would remove the large stone that sealed the entrance of his tomb. They were asking each other: “Who will roll away the stone?”

Well, as we know, the stone had already been rolled away. How? We don’t know. Jesus’ resurrection happened with no one there. Nobody knows exactly how that stone was rolled away. But what Scripture does make clear is this: Jesus didn’t resurrect himself. God raised him. Jesus didn’t roll away the stone, though that’s what we generally assume. However, and for good reason, both scripture and Christian tradition strongly affirm that Jesus didn’t raise himself from the dead, his Father raised him. This might seem like unnecessary point to emphasize; after all, what difference does it make?

It makes a huge difference. Jesus didn’t raise himself from the dead and neither can we. That’s the point. For the power of the resurrection to enter us something from beyond us has to remove the huge, immovable rock of our resistance. This is not to deny that we, ourselves, have goodwill and personal strength; but these, though important, are more a precondition for receiving the grace of the resurrection than the power of the resurrection itself, which always comes to us from beyond. We never roll back the stone ourselves!

Who can roll back the stone? Perhaps that isn’t a question we’re particularly anxious about, but we should be. Jesus was entombed and helpless to raise himself up, all the more so for us. Like the women at that first Easter, we need to be anxious: “Who will roll back the stone?” We can’t open our own tombs.

Second, our “locked doors”:

It’s interesting how the believers at that first Easter experienced the resurrected Christ in their lives. The Gospels tell us that they were huddled in fear and paranoia behind locked doors, wanting only to protect themselves, when Christ came through their locked doors, the doors of their fear and self-protection, and breathed peace into them. Their huddling in fear wasn’t because of ill-will or bad faith. In their hearts they sincerely wished that they weren’t afraid, but that good will still didn’t unlock their doors. Christ entered and breathed peace into them in spite of their resistance, their fear, and their locked doors.

Locked Doors

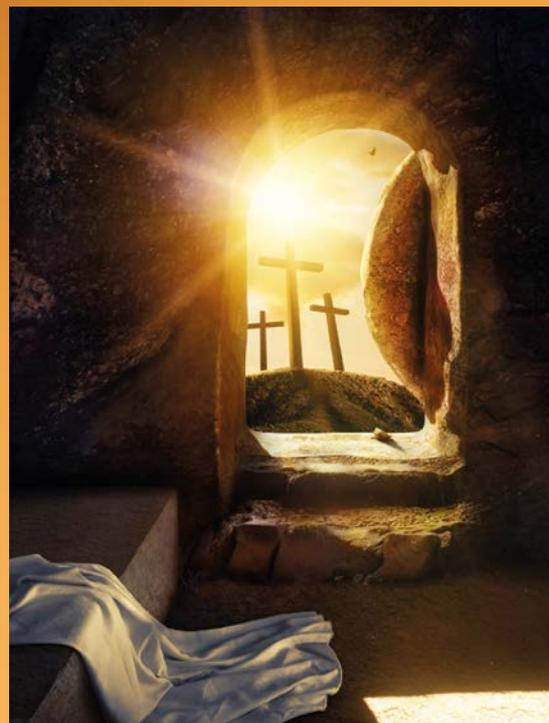
“When we cannot help ourselves we can still be helped and when we are powerless to reach out, grace can still come through the walls of our resistance and breathe peace into us.”

Things haven't changed much in two thousand years. As a Christian community and as individuals we are still mostly huddling in fear, anxious about ourselves, distrustful, not at peace, our doors locked, even as our hearts desire peace and trust. Perhaps, like Kierkegaard, we might want to privilege that scripture passage where the resurrected Christ comes through the locked doors of human resistance and breathes out peace.

Moreover, this year, given this extraordinary time when the coronavirus, Covid 19, has our cities and communities locked down and we are inside our individual houses, dealing with the various combinations of frustration, impatience, fear, panic, and boredom that assail us there. Right now we need a little extra something to experience the resurrection, a stone needs to be rolled away so that resurrected life can come through our locked doors and breathe peace into us.

At the end of the day, these two images, “the stone that needs to be rolled away” and the “locked doors of our fear”, contain within themselves perhaps the most consoling truth in all religion because they reveal this about God's grace: When we cannot help ourselves we can still be helped and when we are powerless to reach out, grace can still come through the walls of our resistance and breathe peace into us. We need to cling to this

whenever we experience irretrievable brokenness in our lives, when we feel helpless inside our wounds and fears, when we feel spiritually inept, and when we grieve loved ones lost to addictions or suicide. The resurrected Christ can come through locked doors and roll back any stone that entombs us, no matter how hopeless the task is for us.





The Feast of St Eugene

- A Reflection on the present moment by Fr. Oliver Barry, OMI, Provincial Leader of the Oblates in Britain and Ireland

On the 21st of May we celebrate the feast of St. Eugene De Mazenod. We celebrate his Missionary Life as the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. His calling was shaped by the experience of the French Revolution. He sought to bring the message of Christ to a society and a church that had known the traumatic experience of those years. We are living through a similar experience in our world today due to the COVID-19 crisis. Much that we have known has changed dramatically over these last couple of months. What we have taken for granted is no longer there. We are like the people of Israel who journeyed in the Desert in search of a new home. What will life be like for us as we emerge from this desert time? Will we just go back to the old "normal" or will there be a new "normal". Can we bring with us lessons from this time of isolation? Will we have learnt anything about the value of silence and solitude? Will we have greater compassion for one another? Will we have a greater appreciation for the simple things of life?

During these days we have not been able to meet together around the Eucharistic table. When this is all over will we have a different understanding of what it means to be a Eucharistic People? Over the Internet we have been able to hear the "Good News" shared by so many different people. We have been invited to a deeper appreciation of how God speaks through the words and experience of all Christ's disciples. I have been struck by the depth and richness shared by so many of our Partners in the Morning and Evening prayers on our Province website. People are sharing the experience of the present moment and linking that experience with message of Christ revealed in the Scriptures. These sharing's help to lead us through this desert time to lead us from darkness to light. Though we are in isolation we can come to a deeper appreciation of the giftedness and uniqueness of one's another. The seeds that are sown in this time of lockdown will bear fruit when we meet again around the Eucharistic table.

So many are giving generously in time and service to those most vulnerable. They are putting into action

the words of Jesus at the Last Supper when he said "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." Jn.13:14.

Sharing the word and loving one's neighbour are at the heart of what it is to be a Eucharistic community. These days can strengthen our bonds with one another. They can lead us to a new awareness of the connection between faith and life. When we next meet around the Eucharistic table we can be more a more inclusive people and have a new awareness of who we are as a community making up the Body of Christ in our world. We can appreciate more fully the rich contribution that each individual can make to the life and Mission of the Church. This period of time has a lot to teach us.

Over these months many families have lost loved one's. In our Oblate Community in Inchicore four men have died, Tony Carroll, Tom Scully, John Murphy and John Nolan. On the day when we recall the death of Eugene De Mazenod we remember them in the same way we remember St. Eugene. We give thanks for their lives. We celebrate their mission. We honour their memory. Each of them shared in their own unique way in the Mission of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The work begun by St. Eugene was continued by them. We now are invited with our Partners to continue that Mission in the circumstances in which we now live and in the new reality that will face us as we move through these difficult days towards a new future.

During these days we could be tempted to become self-centred. For most of us, for the time being our world has become smaller. We are confined into a much smaller space. We meet only a very small number of people face to face. However as Oblates of Mary Immaculate we are part of a worldwide family. What happens in Brazil, Sri Lanka, Indonesia or elsewhere is part of our story. It was said of Saint Eugene that he was a "bishop with a heart as big as St. Pauls', as big as the world." Can we continue to find ways to reach out with big hearts to one another and to those most vulnerable whether within our own communities, on our streets or on the other side of the world?



Looking to the future with faithful hope

During these recent months our lives have been characterized by uncertainty. We don't know when any of this will end for good or where and who the virus will strike next. We are experiencing a prolonged time of waiting. We are longing and hoping for a return to what we knew as familiar and 'normal.' Perhaps we are now tempted to look back fondly even nostalgically on the mundane and ordinariness of our working and family lives. Maybe we long to 'go back' to our daily shopping, socialising, meeting friends or just going for a walk without being anxious or afraid.

But we can't go back, we can only move forward and the only thing we can know about the future is that it won't be the same as the past. This pandemic is rightly called and a 'crisis'. We usually use the word 'crisis' to describe something negative. But the meaning of the word actually has a much broader meaning. It is originally a medical term. It means the turning point in an illness (or disease) when an important change takes place, either for better or worse. It is a crucial turning point. It is fraught with danger, but it is also brimming with hope. The Corona virus has changed our lives quickly and drastically. It has brought about a huge time of change for all of us locally, nationally and globally.

Naturally we are all asking, when will things get back to normal? The short answer is probably never! We can't go back, we can only move forward. Only God holds our past, present and future in balance. God takes our past and present and takes them with us into our future. Nothing is wasted. Hopefully the mistakes we have made and the hurts we have experienced will become the moments and seeds of our growth. Our apparent failures are not the end of our story and journey; but stepping stones to a brighter and better chapter of the same story – the story of our daily lives. We all want this to be over and we are all rightly concerned about our jobs, work, livelihoods and the economy. Maybe the deeper call is to try to see this through the eyes of faith. God say to each of us; 'I know the plans I have for you', plans to bring about the future you hope for, plans to bring you prosperity.' (Jeremiah 28.11)

After resurrection, Jesus was not interested in going back to the past to where and how things were. He met and encountered his friends and followers as they were; fearful, worried, anxious and disappointed. So much so, after all that happened, they in fact back did go back to the past, the 'normal'.

They returned to what they knew best – fishing. It was on the beach while they were fishing that Jesus appeared to them. In all of his appearances, Jesus bore the wounds of his crucifixion. He acknowledged the past but he was not held back by it. He encouraged them to look to the future with hope, courage and conviction - he would be with them always. There was no going back.

Perhaps like them, these days we too are worried and confused. We are missing the past and what we have lost and we are anxious about the future. We will never be offered again this opportunity to consider what is most essential, precious and valuable to us; how we forge a future bigger than our past. If we only want to go back to what we have always known, will we have learnt anything about ourselves, each other or the world?

Strange and even difficult as it seems to us now, perhaps we are being called to realise and appreciate, even at this challenging time, that this is really a once in a century invitation to imagine and create a richer, deeper and more meaningful future for all of us.

This in reality is not a time to look back to the past, no matter how fondly we recall and remember it. This is a time for creatively and prayerfully imagining a better future and to start living that future now – this very day. As God says, 'Do not cling to the events of the past or dwell on what happened in the past. See I am doing something new! See how it springs up, do you not see it?' (Is.43.18)

We are not alone these days. Jesus is with us just as he was with his followers and friends after the crucifixion. As they experienced his death, they also shared in the new life of his Resurrection, just as we do. His death was not the end; it was only one step on the journey that led to his Resurrection and the promise of a brighter future. The very same risen Jesus is with us as we try our best every day to come to terms with we are experiencing. He stood by their side and pointed to a future they could never have thought of or imagined. Encouraged and strengthened by his presence, they boldly proclaimed the Good News of the Resurrection. They didn't look back; they took courageous steps into an unknown future that was filled with challenges and opportunities. Are we being asked to do the same these days? Are we being called to boldly step into the future with faith in each other and Jesus? Let's hope so! Nobody ever hurt their eyes by looking to the future!

– Michael Moore, OMI

Lockdown

– not the same for everyone

by: Fr. Eduardo “Ponpon” Vasquez, Jr., OMI

Like in many parts of the world the government in the Philippines has placed the country in lockdown to try and slow the spread of the virus. For the last month two Oblates Fr Eduardo Vasquez and Fr Rey Amancio have traded in their normal vestments for a blue hazmat suit over which they wear a stole and their Oblate crosses. Together they work in some of the poorest areas of their community to bring relief, both literal and spiritual. We invited Fr Eduardo to share the story of this missionary response:

In this time of lockdown because of the pandemic crisis, the most affected are the homeless, the “isang kahig, isang tuka” families, (an idiom in Filipino that means just having enough to get by) the beggars, the scrap dealers, the garbage collectors, the prostitutes, the street vendors, and all the laborers who work in the institutions with “no work, no pay policy.”

I am presently assigned as one of the parochial vicars in the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace Parish. It is located in Caloocan City, the third most populous city in the Philippines. Our immediate response to the situation when the lockdown was declared by the government was to purchase 200 sacks of rice and canned goods for the poor.

During the fourth week of the lockdown, the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace started to distribute food packs, cooked meals, raw vegetables and vegetable seeds to the poor in the different barangays and the individuals who come to the parish to ask for help.

Cash assistance has also been given to individuals who have special needs. Personal Protective Equipment has been distributed to the frontliners of the church and other people who needed them like the garbage collector and those working in the funeral parlors and morgues.

Since the declaration of the lockdown, online religious services such as the daily Mass, funeral blessings, prayer for the sick and counseling, have been administered in the parish. On the other hand, Fr. Rey Amancio, OMI and I have been managing the relief operation and the spiritual needs of those who do not have access to the internet.

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The support of the Oblate community in Caloocan to send us to the field, gave us more freedom to respond to the growing needs of the people especially the poor in this time of lockdown. Being in the frontline, our daily schedule varies everyday depending on the request and the need of the people for relief goods, anointing of the sick, emergency baptism, blessing of a village and the blessing of the dead in the morgues or in the crematorium.

What I find most challenging and risky ministry during this time of pandemic is the blessing of the dead. There was a time when Fr. Rey & I blessed more than 20 unclaimed cadavers in a morgue. But the causes of death of the other cadavers were unknown to us. They were not tested and therefore nobody knew whether they died of corona virus disease or other diseases. The risk therefore for a priest of being contaminated with corona virus is very high.

The blessing of the people, the blessing of the house, and the anointing of the sick are done usually whenever we distribute relief goods. We do them all at once to maximize our limited time of going to the houses of the poor. As I reflect on these experiences the following are some of the core insights that have emerged for me:

1. Risking is an essential part of our identity as Oblates.

The word Oblate means offering. To risk our lives for the people we serve is the true meaning of being an Oblate. Fr. Rey and I have responded to the urgent needs of the poor in this time of pandemic because we are Oblates and like our Founder St. Eugene de Mazenod, we should leave nothing undared.



2. The pandemic calls us to become more creative in our ministry.

Our vocation as Oblates is not limited to presiding over religious gatherings and rituals. We are especially called to feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to listen to the poor, to pray for them, and to be one with them in this time of pandemic.

As Oblates, our Founder St. Eugene, asked us to be closed to the people. This pandemic should not stop us from being closed to the people. We must find ways to reach out to them and to let them feel the presence of God especially in this time of pandemic. But this has to be done creatively and more prudently. That is why in our Oblate community in Grace Park, we made a conscious decision that only two Oblates must go out for the meantime. This is one example of creativity and prudence. We know that we need a plan to continue our mission in this time of pandemic. This means that two other Oblates will continue our mission in case either Fr Rey or myself fall ill or die.

3. Lock down is not the same for everyone.

For those who have enough money and food, it is just like a holiday. But for those who have none, lockdown is equivalent to a death sentence. The Philippines being a poor country with more than 109 million population, has a limited capacity to feed all the people in this time of lockdown. There are still many street dwellers that need attention. Fr. Rey and I with our parish team, visit them almost every night and we feed them with the food donations that we receive. They need a proper shelter too. We need more sponsors for their needs. There are many good things that can be done in this time of pandemic crisis. We should not allow the lockdown to stop us from doing good works.

4. The Church must also find ways to address the need of the 'non-netizens'.

As I have roamed around Caloocan City since the lockdown was imposed, I see too the urgent need to address the needs of the non-netizens. They are the ordinary citizens who have no access to the internet. The feeding of the poor, the baptism of the infants, the anointing of the sick and the blessing of the dead are ministries which are essential during this time of pandemic.

5. Every household must learn to produce its own food during this time of pandemic.

The Church must continue to feed the poor but she must also teach them how to feed themselves. This is the reason behind the project G.R.A.C.E. which the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace parish launched on May 3, 2020.

The goal of this project is food sufficiency in every home. With or without the pandemic, we encourage all families to plant vegetables in their homes. We distribute vegetable seeds to those who are interested and we teach them how to produce organic fertilizers online. Through this project we hope to address the problem of food scarcity at least in this parish especially during this time of lockdown.

Conclusion:

What I have shared in this article is a narrative of the specific responses of our local church to the challenge of the corona virus pandemic. This global crisis has indeed affected everyone but the most affected are the poorest among the poor. Without providing them enough food and proper shelter, the lockdown order of the government can never be properly followed. Many poor will continue to go out and many will continue to remain in the streets because they do not have their own home. Lockdown is indeed not the same for everyone. Let us not allow our generosity be contaminated with the novel virus of greed and selfishness. Let us extend our helping hands to those in need.

Remembering Our Dead



The Coronavirus Pandemic has affected people from all walks of life. Many families have lost loved ones to this virus. During Holy Week, in April the Oblate Community at the House of Retreat in Dublin lost four of its members. In tribute to the commitment of each of these men we would like to share some of their stories.

Fr John Murphy OMI (1926 – 2020)

John Murphy was born on April 1st 1926 in Termonfechin, Co. Louth, 'the cultural capital of the world', as he himself would say. After his Secondary education was completed, he entered the Oblate Novitiate (Cahermoyle) in September 1944. He made his Final Profession as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate at the Oblate Scholasticate, Piltown, Co. Kilkenny in 1948, and was ordained priest there in 1951.

After ordination, he was assigned to the home Province, and appointed to parish ministry at Corpus Christi Parish, Leeds (1951-'68). His next parish appointment was to St Anne's Parish, Birmingham (1968-'71). His next appointment, however, was to the mission staff at Inchicore, and the very different work of preaching parish missions. After 12 years (1971-'85) of getting to know parish communities in every corner of Ireland, he was appointed Parish Priest to Our Lady of Lourdes & St Bernadette Parish, Kingswood, Bristol (1985-'89). This was followed by an appointment to the Oblate Retreat Centre, Wistaston Hall, Crewe (1989-'97). In 1997, John came back to pastoral ministry, to St Anne's Parish, Rock Ferry (1997-'02) where he and Ray Warren were the Oblate community.

A deeply spiritual man, John cherished his parishioners and the rhythm of pastoral ministry. People appreciated his open and caring presence and his ready availability to meet the endless demands of parish ministry. Ray Warren writes: "John radiated a rare and special quality that drew people toward him. He was, in a gospel sense, 'childlike', loving God as a young child loves a parent. This was the love that came through in his preaching and his encounters with people pastorally or socially. His natural warmth and kindness were particularly evident in his pastoral care of sick and housebound people.

John loved the natural world and nature's cycle. His greatest enjoyment was caring for the flowers and plants in the garden or tending to a patch of ground that he cultivated for vegetables, his trusted dog 'Sam' by his side. His life was a well woven pattern of prayer, deep, long and natural, never forced.

He kept a diary, a personal account of his encounters along the road of life. With encouragement from his family, he learned to communicate through email, further strengthening his links with friends and family. As he got older, he became smaller and, as his eyes grew dim, he became ever more radiant with that childlike quality that all who knew him will understand."



Fr John Nolan OMI (1936 – 2020)

A native of Wexford Town, John Nolan was born on 1 March 1936. Sadly, his mother died when he was child, leaving 2 small children. John and his older sister were reared as part of their aunt's family; their father had to find work in England to support them. When John spoke of his early life, he marvelled at the goodness of his aunt who treated his sister and himself as she did her own children. He remembered a happy childhood and young adult years.

John entered Cahermoyle, the Oblate novitiate in Co Limerick, in 1955. His Final Profession as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate was 4 years later at the Oblate Scholasticate, Piltown, Co. Kilkenny; he was ordained priest there on 23 February 1963.

His first obedience was for the Oblate Central Province of Kimberley-Bloemfontein. When he arrived in South Africa in 1964, as one of the earliest Irish Oblates assigned to work with the German and Flemish Oblates in this Province, John was sent to work at Assisi Mission, with the Basotho people who lived in rural village communities. It was also a time to learn to speak their language, Sesotho.

These were difficult years in South Africa; the apartheid regime was in full force and its laws governed all aspects of life, making a missionary's work and life among the Basotho stressful and difficult. The people, however, were simple and beautiful. To appreciate John's life as a Missionary Oblate and the quality of the pastoral and social relationships he lived with the range of people he served, one need look no further than the Sesotho name given to him by these first African people among whom he began his ministry in 1964. Their name for John was "Ramosa", meaning, the father of kindness.

All of us, from the Basotho people who named him 'Ramosa', to the many communities he served for over 50 years in Africa, and all who were part of his life here and back home in Ireland, have been privileged and blessed by this touch of kindness and care... which for John was a reflection of God's care for us'.



Fr Thomas Scully OMI (1930 – 2020)

Tom Scully was born in Tullamore, Co. Offaly, on 19 May 1930. Second level education completed at Belcamp College, Dublin in June 1948, he entered the Oblate Novitiate that September. An excellent student, he studied philosophy at UCD, followed by theology at the Oblate Scholasticate in Co. Kilkenny, where he was ordained priest on 15 September 1955.

The following year he was assigned to Belcamp College, where he would teach mathematics for the next 13 years. His innovative game tactics and motivational coaching in football and hurling were greatly appreciated, not alone by players but by the whole school, as success on the sports field injected new life into the school experience. Former Belcamp students remember Tom fondly as their teacher and coach for football and hurling, but especially for his kindness and consistent avoidance of criticism; how he encouraged and motivated them. He could lift his young players to the point where they could, and indeed did, overcome top class opposition.

A one-year teaching appointment at St Benedict's College, Johannesburg (1969-'70) followed. He then returned to the Province to work as an Irish Emigrant Chaplain in England, first in Manchester (1970-'71), and then as director at Catholic Housing Aid, Birmingham (1971-'75). His next appointment was as pastor at St Peter's Parish, Leigh-on-Sea (1975-'81). From 1981 to 1986, he was Parish Priest at Our Lady of the Wayside, Bluebell, Dublin. There followed a 5-year term as Director of the London Irish Centre (1986-'91). He then returned to St Peter's Parish, Leigh-on-Sea as Parish Priest (1991-'97). Short appointments to St John Ogilvie Parish, Edinburgh (1988-'89), and St Michael's Parish, Inchicore (1999-'01), were followed by a term as community superior at the House of Retreat Inchicore, where he continued to live in retirement until the end of his life.

A young Oblate working with Tom in the late 1970s recalls him summarising his team philosophy in the Latin phrase 'Age quod agis' (do well whatever you do).



Fr Anthony Carroll OMI (1929-2020)

Anthony (Tony) Carroll was born in West Derby, Liverpool on 28 February 1929. His family were parishioners at St Teresa's Parish, Norris Green, which was then an Oblate parish. After completing second level education at St. Edward's College, in 1945, he entered the Oblate novitiate at Cahermoyle, Co. Limerick. Five years later he made his Final Profession as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate at the OMI Scholasticate in Piltown, Co. Kilkenny. He was ordained to priesthood there on 22 June 1952.

His first pastoral appointment as a 23-year old newly ordained priest was to Our Lady of Victories Parish, Cinderford (1952-'60). Then, after a 1-year appointment to St Mary Star of the Sea Parish, Leith, Edinburgh, he was invited to join the mission community at Wistaston Hall, Crewe. Tony would look back on his 6 years preaching missions in parishes across Britain, as one of the most satisfying and fruitful periods in his life. The variety and scope that this work offered suited him, and he was good at it.

He went from there to St Joseph's Parish, Weatherby, Yorkshire (1967-'71), before returning to Liverpool, his home city, as Pastor at Holy Cross Parish in the City's docklands (1971-'76). Tony moved across the Mersey to St Anne's Parish, Rock Ferry (1976-'81), was an enthusiastic contributor to developing collaboration between the three Merseyside Oblate parishes. In 1981, when the Diocese asked the Oblates to accept pastoral responsibility for St Mary's Parish, Crewe, Tony became the Parish's first Oblate Pastor.

In 1992, he was appointed Provincial Treasurer and he moved to Dublin for a position he would hold for the next twelve years

Tony was a deeply private person, but his life-long passionate support for Everton Football Club was something he couldn't hide. He was a season ticket holder until he moved to Dublin.

He retired from public ministry in 2004, and moved to the Oblate community at Inchicore in 2016. He quickly blended in to this community, renewing some old friendships from his student days, and his helpful and considerate presence was much appreciated by both his brother Oblates and the staff who cared for them.

Blessed with excellent memory and a keen mind, he retained an interest in emerging local and world events until the end of his life. He accepted patiently the limitations of failing health, and was deeply grateful for the care and kindness of staff who took care of him and the support of his brothers.

A Prayer

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages "curing every disease and illness."

Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus.
May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents neighbours from helping one another.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Whether we are home or abroad, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare.

In place of our anxiety, give us your peace.

Jesus Christ, heal us. Amen

Oblate Novena for Vocations

May 21st - 29th

During these days each year we are invited to take time to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. We also remember the many ways that members of the wider Oblate family live their vocations of service and building community together. As we strive to live with the reality of the corona virus we have seen how many people are living their vocations and witnessing to values such as a commitment and dedication to the others, compassion, sympathy and demonstrating a real love for one another.

Pope Francis in his homily for World Youth Day in April said: "Dear friends, look at the real heroes who come to light in these days: they are not famous, rich and successful people; rather, they are those who are giving themselves in order to serve others. Feel called yourselves to put your lives on the line.

Do not be afraid to devote your life to God and to others; it pays! For life is a gift we receive only when we give ourselves away, and our deepest joy comes from saying yes to love, without ifs and buts. To truly say yes to love, without ifs and buts. As Jesus did for us."

In preparing for this year's novena, Fr Dominick writes that there is a "great and urgent need for the new vocations to the priesthood and religious life and we are also convinced that the Lord will provide his servants from the communities and families which are truly following the great example of our Saviour." So this year you are invited to join the prayer for vocations online. From the 21st to the 29th of May we will stream our short vocation videos at 2.00 p.m.

Let us also make the Pope's invitation a prayer...

To see the world
through the eyes
of the
crucified
Christ...



Lord Jesus, who gave your life for us,

in infinite love, without "ifs" and "buts," touch the hearts of many young people,

May they hear the call to risk their lives without fear for the welfare of others as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Allow them to discover that it is in giving that they receive, and that their deepest joy is to respond unconditionally in love as you did for us.

You who rose from the dead for our salvation and live with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.

Mary Immaculate, model and guardian of our lives, pray for us.



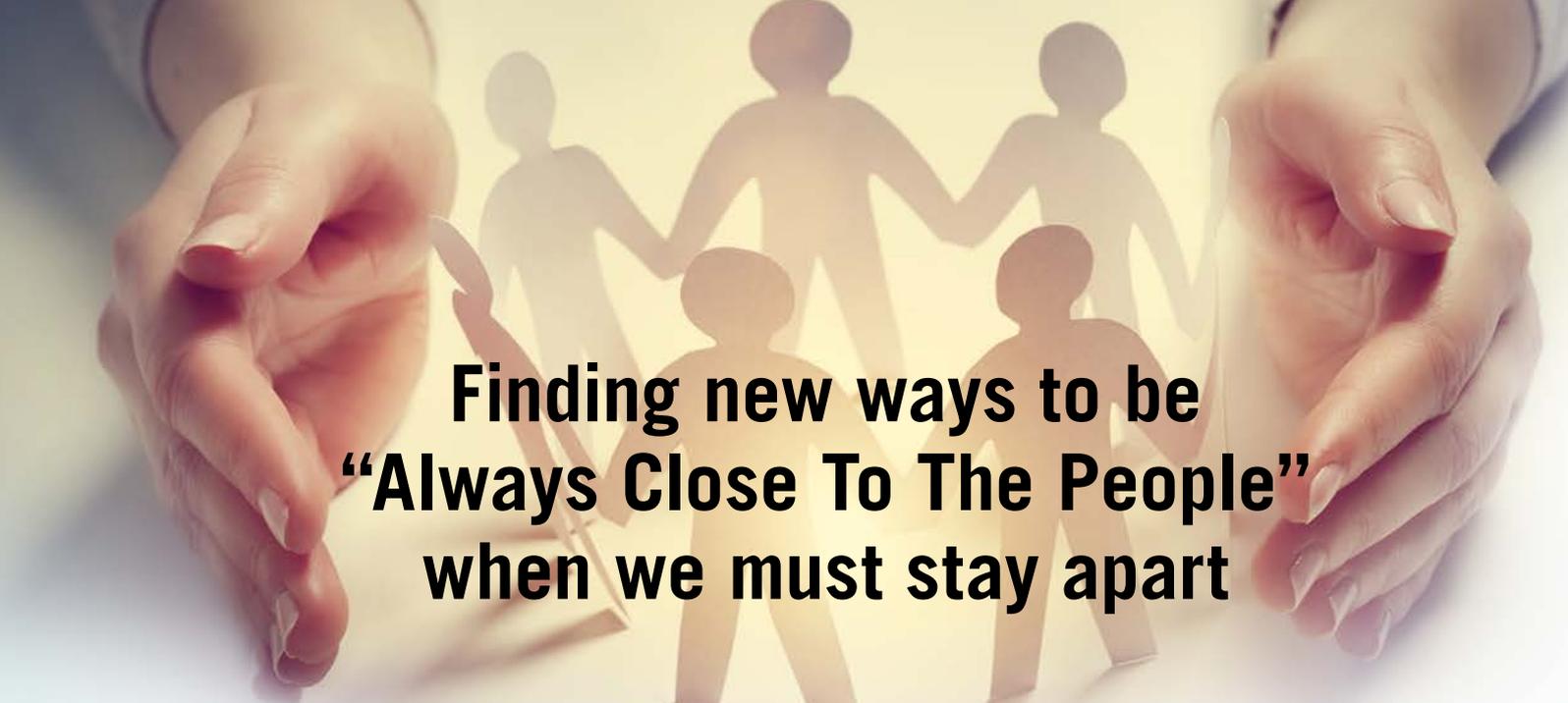
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Finding new ways to be “Always Close To The People” when we must stay apart

Since “lockdown” commenced in Britain and Ireland in mid to late March, we found that we must engage with new ways of being present and available to our faith communities, and to also reach out to those on the margins who may be seeking some faith and community support during these days of uncertainty and worry.

One of the ways that the Oblates in Britain and Ireland have tried to achieve this is by initiating and producing short daily times of prayer and community on our online channels. We have invited those online to join a member of the Oblate family as they present a short time of morning prayer, community and reflection. This video is broadcast each morning at 9.30am and is available through our website and social media channels.

In solidarity with the members of the community and all those who are currently cocooning, we also decided to facilitate a short night prayer online with the Oblate communities in Darndale-Belcamp, Dublin, Kilburn, London, and Leith, Edinburgh. which goes online each evening at 7pm and 9.30pm. Here, the communities offer a short space for reflection, prayer and community, often requesting those watching to join them in praying for a particular intention.

For many, that short time of personal prayer and reflection provided a welcome opportunity to help focus the day.

“I just wanted to say THANK YOU for the morning and night prayers you’ve been streaming everyday. I’m a foreigner living alone in Tokyo, Japan and you wouldn’t believe how much these prayers are a great source of comfort and support to me during this pandemic. I’m praying for the Oblates. Stay safe and God bless each of you.”

These short videos have reached a significant number of people online and it is evident that in the wider



community, people are searching for community, support and sense of solidarity at this time. Across the board, both online and on broadcast TV, there has been an uptake by the public tuning into religious programmes.

There are now four of our Oblate Parishes live-streaming daily and Sunday mass on Facebook. Since the beginning of the shutdown, Our Lady of the Wayside Parish, Bluebell, and St Mary’s Star of the Sea Parish in Leith, Sacred Heart Parish in Kilburn and St Joseph’s in Colwyn Bay. Huge work has been put into the live streaming of services each day by the communities, and they also provided beautiful live Easter Triduum services during Holy Week which was deeply appreciated by both their parishioners and those tuning in from many other locations. Other Oblate parishes are using Zoom to bring people together for a chat and for prayer.

Another project that has helped to bring comfort to many in a time of distress is our Daily Reflection email for Lent- this consists of a very short daily reflection, prayer and action point inspired by a piece of scripture from the Mass of the day. This is produced by the Partners in Mission team and in response to a number of requests, the team decided to extend the project to continue throughout the Easter season up to Pentecost. You can sign up to receive this daily email at <https://oblates.ie/e-newsletter/>

In response to the recent building of our faith community online, we have received some positive feedback:

“What I really like about the Oblate live streaming is that it feels as though there is an understanding that we need more than to just observe the ‘usual’ services. And each contributor is speaking with each of us person to person... I feel the Oblates have taken on board our need for a short focused connection each day and evening. I love that the morning prayer has been ending with the prayer for strength. I’d been saying it myself each day but it is so much better to say it with someone. I often watch the pieces more than once - just something to go to during the day. In the beginning of this Emergency I was searching for something - while I tried others the Oblates daily posts have hit the spot for me. I feel it works on so many levels.. but most importantly that whoever is doing it is speaking to ‘me’. It’s a one on one, while of course reaching out to many. Thanks.”

Lastly, another relatively new initiative, The Social Oblate, is produced by the province communications team and released twice a month, a general video on the 1st of the month, and a video with a vocations theme on the 17th of each month. Some of this video content is being translated into Vietnamese, Polish and Spanish. Given the situation of the pandemic, the young Oblates are using new means of communication such as Zoom to continue the conversation on faith, vocations and spirituality.

You can join us each day at 9.30am and 9.30pm for morning and night prayer. Please also join our Oblate parishes for their live services each day.

- Rebecca Roughneen

For more information please see
www.oblates.ie / www.oblates.co.uk

or search “The Oblates” on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube & Instagram.



Anglesey - A Local Community Response in Difficult Times

The parish of St Mary’s Holyhead, part of the Anglesey Island Mission, has formed a group called Helping Hands. Our role is to help the vulnerable during this crisis. We give support wherever we can by delivering shopping, collecting medication, posting letters and anything practical we can do to help those in isolation. We also have a phone helpline for emergencies, to give information and just a chance to chat for those who are worried or lonely. We have 15

volunteers who have each been given a district to look after. They check in with anyone on their list of vulnerable members of their community to make sure they are well and cared for. We try to follow, in a small way, in the footsteps of St Eugene in helping those in need during a time of pestilence. We hope to be a small light in the darkness at this time. We are grateful for all those who give their time selflessly to bring that light to others.

Housebound in Lockdown



In common with many other facilities which care for our elders the House of Retreat in Inchicore, Dublin was placed into lockdown in March. Originally from Wales Fr. Terry Keogh-Williams has ministered in a wide number of places. Now in his early eighties he has been an active member of the community in Inchicore for the last number of years. In this short piece he reflects on his “lockdown” experience.

I have lost count of the weeks we have been housebound, could be six or seven, at least. The room I occupy, second floor corner, with two windows, one looking out over Tyrconnell park, and in the distance the tricolour flying over the President’s residence, all accompanied by the gradual bursting out of spring as the trees in the park cascade out with fresh green prospects. In the far distance the airport is virtually dead, aircraft used to be flying in and out every few minutes, but now perhaps one or two, even in a day. (By the way, this room used to belong to the late Eoghan Haughey and he is a good companion during these days of isolation, his contemplative spirit is in the air, the walls echo with the music of Seán Ó Sé and especially ‘An Poc ar Buile’)

The second window looks down over the front garden and school playground, void of young children exploring their rich imaginations as they entertain the spectators at Páirc an Chrócaigh or Old Trafford with their magnificent footwork and spectacular goals, all during breaktime. But that moment of delight has been replaced by the many parents with very young children who come now to enjoy the fresh air, and linger in the warm sun, and exercise in the school yard, toddlers riding their bikes under the watchful eye of

parents, who probably now have much more personal time with their families.

Hundreds of people, day and night, walk through the yard to take advantage of the grounds (although Rosary Square is now closed off and reserved as a safe space for the Oblate community to exercise) exercising their dogs of all breeds and sizes; and no doubt saying an Ave for Tony Carroll, Tom Scully, John Nolan and John Murphy (though he is quite content to rest in the soil of his ancestors at Termonfeckin by the sea) May they all rest in peace. We are still confined to house and Rosary Square and unable to visit the graves.

We all miss our community life together, meals, Eucharist and office, and the chat, but live in hope that all may soon be restored. Spiritually, for me it has been a time of grace and renewal. Quite unexpectedly the daily office has become a source of joy and inspiration, rather than a chore, at it sometime seemed, it has invited me to look closer at the Psalms, in the light of the Hebrew study Bible with side commentary, and to bring this new found meaning to my time of prayerful reflection. The book of Revelation has been accompanying us during this long journey and, again, what in the past was something to be got through as a formality has also become a deepening of the presence of the spirit in the same confusions that percolate through our modern world.

This new awareness needs to be accompanied by good commentary and Richard Bauckham ‘The Theology of The Book of Revelation’ has made some sense of these prescribed readings. Like all of us I miss the daily Eucharist, some follow the abundance of Masses provided on the internet, but my room is on the edge of the house Wi-Fi, and I am not hard wired to the ethernet, so I frequently lose the transmission. So I have been using the daily/Sunday Missal and the prescribed readings (and doing some lectio then and there) and celebrating Eucharist spiritually, but taking advantage of all the 9 or so eucharistic prayers on offer, which enable you to bring our suffering people and earth around the Table of the Lord.

The time has passed swiftly and personally I have never felt isolated or bored, or searching for something to do to past the time away. In fact, it has been something of a sabbatical! Yes, a sabbatical. There were so many ideas to be explored, books to be read, growing list of ideas, which would provide the menu for a fruitful sabbatical; I have been able to go back to the thesis I had been working on at Lampeter and give it some acceptable shape (no intention of publishing) but many of the gaps have been filled in some fresh insights incorporated having time to think without pressure of preparing for seminars.

Above all in these dark days, we have experienced a profound avalanche of light and love, care and patience, from our brother Oblates Willie Fitzpatrick and Liam Griffin, from the medical/nursing, care, and

household staff, who are the real heroines of these days. These wonderful women who heal and counsel, bring our meals to our rooms, even providing an individual daily paper (even the observer) to our rooms.

To sum up: As of yet we have no opportunity to compare notes or reflect together on our experience, or think about a road-map for the days ahead, but I think we all could echo the words of the Psalmist: We all know by this time that we are –

“Planted in the house of the Lord. They [we] will flourish in the courts of our God, still bearing fruit when we are old, still full of sap, still green, to proclaim that the Lord is just. In him my rock there is no wrong.”

Lourdes Update

Dear Fellow Pilgrim,

It is with regret and disappointment that we have no option but to postpone our 2020 Pilgrimage to Lourdes until 2021, due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Government and health authorities in Ireland, Britain and France, have placed restrictions on the movement of people and have introduced physical distancing as a means of reducing the spread of the virus.

Many staff members are presently engaged caring for the sick and the dying and it would be unfair to ask that they would volunteer to care for the sick on pilgrimage this year. Even if this terrible virus has been overcome, many of our frontline workers would be due a richly deserved rest. Confidence in air travel and hotel accommodation in general has been considerably eroded and it would be difficult to put a core pilgrimage together. Indeed it would be reckless to try and build a pilgrimage in these uncertain times as so many factors are outside of our control.

It has to be said as well that the Sanctuary in Lourdes remains locked until at least 31st August in adherence to French Government regulations and the closure may continue beyond that date.

It is in the light of these and other measures but above all, the health and safety of all pilgrims that this decision has to be made.

The Executive Committee of United Irish Pilgrimages to Lourdes has reflected too on the current situation with the leadership of all those pilgrimages who travel to Lourdes in August/September and the clear consensus is that there is no other option but to postpone our Diocesan/Religious Order Pilgrimages and reschedule for agreed dates in 2021. The scheduled date for the Oblate Pilgrimage is 17th to 22nd September 2021.

Thank you for your support and understanding. As we remember the dead, the dying and the sick, let us trust in our loving God, seeking our Blessed Lady's help and protection and the intercession of St. Bernadette.

Yours sincerely
– Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly OMI

*Lourdes 2021
17th to 22nd September 2021*

OBLATE COVID-19 EMERGENCY APPEAL

Covid-19 affects all of us. To a greater or lesser extent we are, and will be, changed by the suffering our planet is presently experiencing. All around us there is pain and tragedy the like of which we have never before lived through. Yet despite all of this, we are the lucky ones. In so many parts of our world there is no proper health infrastructure to support those who become infected, no social security or emergency benefits to help the isolated or unemployed and an already crushing poverty which makes acts of generosity almost impossible.

As a World-wide Missionary Congregation the Oblates work in all corners of the globe, and in most places we work with the poorest and most marginalised in society. Faced with the unimaginable suffering their people now endure some Oblate Missions have had no option but to turn in hope and faith to their Oblate brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Two such requests have recently come from the Oblate Missions in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The following notes, written by the leaders of these Missions, speak for themselves.



In Bangladesh...

every day many are getting infected. Our health system is very poor. People are more anxious for daily food than health or social distancing.

We work with the indigenous, tea-estate and internal migrants, the most underprivileged and poorest in our country. We have already begun to stand by them in our Oblate Parishes. With own little sacrifices, we are helping 500 families as best we can by giving rice, dal and oil.

The need is massive. If there is any possibility that you could stand with us, be assured that your generosity will save lives. Please keep us in your prayer.

– Fr Ajit Costa, OMI

In Pakistan...

the number of those infected is increasing very rapidly. The government has imposed strict lock down all over the country, with all people confined to their homes. But so many of those we work with rely on daily wages to survive and they are going through a terrible time. There are people who are deprived of their daily food and many are starving. I know that the whole world is going through a terrible time and I feel hesitant to make this request, yet I am impelled by the situation of the starving people to write this mail to you.

– Fr. Khan Paulus OMI



If you would like to support these appeals please donate online through on our website: oblates.ie alternatively please contact the Oblate Mission Development Office: mdu@oblates.ie

All money raised will go directly to support these two difficult missions.

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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