



Missionary Oblates  
– Always Close to the People

**FREE**  
Please Take One

# Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.51, 21st May, 2021

As we continue our journey living with the ongoing impact of the Pandemic there have been many moments of darkness and light for us all. Over recent months, the increasing hope given to us by the vaccination programmes has helped lift some of the dark clouds that many of us have experienced over the last year. Yet as the pace of the vaccinations has continued to pick up we are called to remember the poor and marginalised of our world for whom the promise of vaccination remains a distant possibility.

Over the course of the last year Pope Francis has continued to remind us of the call to love our God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. In particular he has raised his voice to highlight how Covid-19 calls for international co-operation rather than competing with one another and he recently declared: "A variant of this virus is closed nationalism, which prevents, for example, an internationalism of vaccines."

In the book, Let us Dream, Pope Francis states: "It is moments like these, when we feel a radical powerlessness that we cannot escape on our own, that we come to our senses and see the selfishness of the culture in which we are immersed, that denies the best of who we are. And if, at such moments,

we repent, and look back to our Creator and to each other, we might remember the truth that God put in our hearts: that we belong to Him and to each other."

In this issue of Connections we hear about the efforts being made by the parish community of Colwyn Bay in Wales to respond to the needs of the present moment while in their article Patti-Anne Kay and Peter Doherty, OMI remind us that "As we reach out, let all our actions demonstrate that each person is created in the image and likeness of God."

St. Eugene, whose feast we celebrate on May 21st, lived his vocation with a deep commitment to reaching out to those on the margins of Church and society. At a time when, despite vaccinations, many are still isolated because of Covid-19 let us ask ourselves what we can do to relieve their ongoing loneliness. It might be the simple act of writing a letter or picking up the telephone, but no matter what it may be let our actions be a reminder of the "truth that God put in our hearts: that we belong to Him and to each other." As we journey through the coming months let us place our efforts under the care of Mary our mother and ask that she watch over us as we seek to keep the flame of faith alive in our world today.

– Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly, OMI

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- [Our Heart is Stronger Than Our Wounds](#)..... 2
- [Lourdes Pilgrimage Update](#)..... 3
- [St Joseph & The Dream of Vocations](#)..... 4
- [St Joseph's – Life during the pandemic](#)... 6
- [A Pandemic Journey to Pentecost](#)..... 8
- [Our Lady and the Missionary Oblates](#)..... 10
- [India's Second Wave](#)..... 12
- [The Month of Mary and St Eugene](#)..... 14
- [From the Archives](#)..... 15
- [Upcoming Events at Wistaston Hall](#)..... 16



[www.oblates.ie](http://www.oblates.ie)

# Our Heart is Stronger

– Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Ten years before his death in 1996, Henri Nouwen was beset by a depression that nearly broke him. While in treatment, he wrote a very powerful book, *The Inner Voice of Love*, in which he humbly and candidly shared his struggles and the efforts it took to overcome them. At times, he felt completely overwhelmed by his wounds and obsessions and was on the edge of drowning, of collapse, when the only thing he could do was cry. Eventually though he found again his inner strength and emerged resilient, ready to re-enter his life with renewed energy. Remarking on what he learned from this inner collapse and his eventual return to health, he writes that, in the end, our hearts are stronger than our wounds.

That's a powerful affirmation of a hard-earned truth; but is it always true? Are our hearts always stronger than our wounds? Do we always have the resources deep down to overcome our wounds?

Sometimes yes, as in the case of Nouwen; but sometimes no, as we see in the broken lives of so many. Sometimes, it seems wounds overpower the heart. Perhaps one poignant example can serve to illustrate this. There is a sad, tragic, haunting line in the well-known song, *I Dreamed a Dream*, from the popular musical, *Les Miserables*. The story told in *Les Miserables*, as we know, is based on Victor Hugo's classic book by that title which tells a series of stories about how poverty and oppression can break the hearts, backs, and lives of the poor. One of Hugo's characters, Fantine, is a single mother, abandoned by the man she loves and nursing a broken heart. She is also struggling to provide her daughter with the basic needs of life, struggling with a job and working conditions that are ruining her health, and struggling with sexual harassment from her boss that culminates in her unfair dismissal from her job. At a certain point, it's too much, her health breaks, she collapses, and in her dying farewell sings out a lament that suggests that our hearts aren't always stronger than our wounds; but sometimes there are storms we cannot weather. Sometimes the heart cannot weather the storm and collapses under the weight of its wounds.

Who's right – Nouwen or Fantine? I suspect they both are, depending on one's circumstance, inner health, and emotional resources. An old adage says, whatever doesn't kill you, makes you stronger! True enough, providing it doesn't kill you. Sadly, sometimes it does. Sometimes what weighs us down does kill us. I suspect that everyone reading this has had a first-hand experience of someone you knew and loved breaking down and dying, either by suicide or some other collapse of this sort, due to a broken life, a broken heart, a broken psyche, a wound that overpowered his or her heart.

Thus, when we look at the truth of Nouwen's affirmation that our hearts are stronger than our wounds and the (seeming) antithetical truth that sometimes our wounds can kill the heart, we need to add a further truth which embraces both sides of this: God's grace, forgiveness, and love are stronger than our wounds, our collapses, our failures, and seeming despairs.

Sometimes in our struggles we can access the inner strength buried below our wounds which will enable us to rise above them and walk again in health, strength, and enthusiasm. However, sometimes our wounds so paralyze the heart that we can no longer access the strength that lies deep within us. In this life, that kind of brokenness can look and feel like a terminal collapse, a sadness for which there is no healing, a despair, a wasted life. However, whenever a collusion of bitter circumstance and mental fragility break someone, when a person's heart is no longer stronger than his or her wounds, we can take refuge in a deeper truth and consolation, namely, the strength that lies within God's heart: God's grace, understanding, and love are stronger than our wounds, our collapses, our failures, and seeming despairs.

# Than Our Wounds

What sets Christian faith apart from most other religions (as well as from all prosperity gospels) is that Christianity is a religion of grace and not primarily of self-effort (important though that is). As Christians, we don't have to save ourselves, don't have to get our lives right all on our own. Indeed, nobody ever does. As St. Paul says so clearly in his farewell message in Romans 1-8, none of us ever get our lives right on the basis of our own strength. That's also true in terms of overcoming our wounds. All of us are weak and break down sometimes. However, and this is the point, when the storms of life overpower us, when we reach down for strength to withstand the storm only to find out that the storm is stronger than we are, we need then to reach still deeper and there we will find that God's heart is stronger than our brokenness.

## Lourdes Pilgrimage Update

For many years Pilgrimages Abroad (JWT) have been the travel agent to the Oblate Pilgrimage. It is with sincere regret that we learnt that JWT has announced that it is to cease trading due to the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

We understand that this is a difficult time for the directors and staff of Joe Walsh Pilgrimtours Ltd and we are saddened that it has come to this. Let us ask Our Lady of Lourdes to be a refuge and a comfort to all whose lives are touched adversely by this development.

The following information was included in the press release from Joe Walsh Pilgrimtours Ltd which will assist pilgrims and groups that are owed money.

Joe Walsh Pilgrimtours Ltd. hold a bond with the Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR), which provides financial protection for flight inclusive travel packages originating in Ireland. CAR will manage any outstanding refunds, including those under the Refund Credit Note (RCN) scheme announced by the Irish Government in 2020. Any customer of Joe Walsh Pilgrimtours Ltd. with monies paid towards a cancelled booking or future travel package, should contact CAR and make a claim.

Claim forms can be downloaded here:

<https://www.aviationreg.ie/travel-trade-the-commissions-role/travel-business-collapse-information-and-claim-forms.951.html>

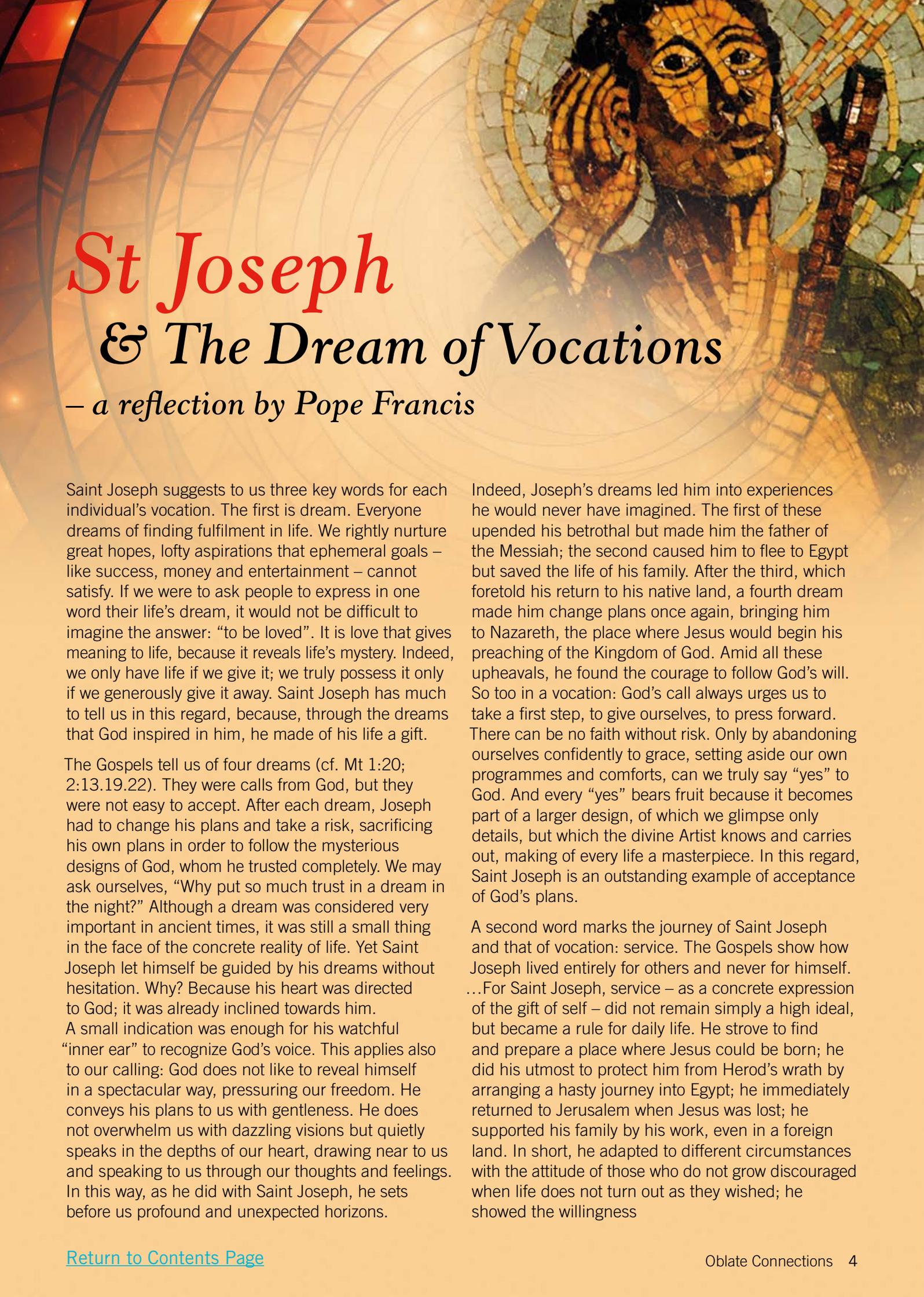
The Commission for Aviation Regulation can be contacted on +353 1 6611700 or [info@aviationreg.ie](mailto:info@aviationreg.ie). More information can be found on their website <https://www.aviationreg.ie>.

Flight inclusive packages originating in the U.K. are financially protected by way of a Total Payment Protection (TOPP) policy provided by Travel & General Insurance Services Ltd. U.K. based customers of Joe Walsh Pilgrimtours Ltd. should contact the Travel & General Insurance Services Ltd. helpline on +44 (0)1702 811397 to commence the refund process.

Joe Walsh Pilgrimtours Ltd. can be contacted by customers with claim related queries on +353 1 2410800 and UK customers on +44(0)161 8208790, Mon to Fri from 9.00a.m. – 1.00 p.m.

### **Oblate Lourdes Digital Pilgrimage – September 17th – 22nd, 2021**

In light of various impacts arising from the ongoing pandemic this year's pilgrimage will be conducted online. Details of the pilgrimage will be available in the coming months on [www.oblates.ie](http://www.oblates.ie)

A mosaic of Saint Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, is the central focus. He is depicted with a beard and curly hair, wearing a dark blue robe. He holds a staff in his right hand and a bundle of greenery in his left. The background features a large, stylized circular motif with concentric lines, suggesting a halo or a celestial sphere. The overall color palette is warm, with golds, oranges, and reds.

# *St Joseph*

## *& The Dream of Vocations*

*– a reflection by Pope Francis*

Saint Joseph suggests to us three key words for each individual's vocation. The first is dream. Everyone dreams of finding fulfilment in life. We rightly nurture great hopes, lofty aspirations that ephemeral goals – like success, money and entertainment – cannot satisfy. If we were to ask people to express in one word their life's dream, it would not be difficult to imagine the answer: "to be loved". It is love that gives meaning to life, because it reveals life's mystery. Indeed, we only have life if we give it; we truly possess it only if we generously give it away. Saint Joseph has much to tell us in this regard, because, through the dreams that God inspired in him, he made of his life a gift.

The Gospels tell us of four dreams (cf. Mt 1:20; 2:13.19.22). They were calls from God, but they were not easy to accept. After each dream, Joseph had to change his plans and take a risk, sacrificing his own plans in order to follow the mysterious designs of God, whom he trusted completely. We may ask ourselves, "Why put so much trust in a dream in the night?" Although a dream was considered very important in ancient times, it was still a small thing in the face of the concrete reality of life. Yet Saint Joseph let himself be guided by his dreams without hesitation. Why? Because his heart was directed to God; it was already inclined towards him.

A small indication was enough for his watchful "inner ear" to recognize God's voice. This applies also to our calling: God does not like to reveal himself in a spectacular way, pressuring our freedom. He conveys his plans to us with gentleness. He does not overwhelm us with dazzling visions but quietly speaks in the depths of our heart, drawing near to us and speaking to us through our thoughts and feelings. In this way, as he did with Saint Joseph, he sets before us profound and unexpected horizons.

Indeed, Joseph's dreams led him into experiences he would never have imagined. The first of these upended his betrothal but made him the father of the Messiah; the second caused him to flee to Egypt but saved the life of his family. After the third, which foretold his return to his native land, a fourth dream made him change plans once again, bringing him to Nazareth, the place where Jesus would begin his preaching of the Kingdom of God. Amid all these upheavals, he found the courage to follow God's will. So too in a vocation: God's call always urges us to take a first step, to give ourselves, to press forward. There can be no faith without risk. Only by abandoning ourselves confidently to grace, setting aside our own programmes and comforts, can we truly say "yes" to God. And every "yes" bears fruit because it becomes part of a larger design, of which we glimpse only details, but which the divine Artist knows and carries out, making of every life a masterpiece. In this regard, Saint Joseph is an outstanding example of acceptance of God's plans.

A second word marks the journey of Saint Joseph and that of vocation: service. The Gospels show how Joseph lived entirely for others and never for himself. ...For Saint Joseph, service – as a concrete expression of the gift of self – did not remain simply a high ideal, but became a rule for daily life. He strove to find and prepare a place where Jesus could be born; he did his utmost to protect him from Herod's wrath by arranging a hasty journey into Egypt; he immediately returned to Jerusalem when Jesus was lost; he supported his family by his work, even in a foreign land. In short, he adapted to different circumstances with the attitude of those who do not grow discouraged when life does not turn out as they wished; he showed the willingness

typical of those who live to serve. In this way, Joseph welcomed life's frequent and often unexpected journeys: from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census, then to Egypt and again to Nazareth, and every year to Jerusalem. Each time he was willing to face new circumstances without complaining, ever ready to give a hand to help resolve situations. We could say that this was the outstretched hand of our heavenly Father reaching out to his Son on earth. Joseph cannot fail to be a model for all vocations, called to be the ever-active hands of the Father, outstretched to his children.

I like to think, then, of Saint Joseph, the protector of Jesus and of the Church, as the protector of vocations. In fact, from his willingness to serve comes his concern to protect. The Gospel tells us that "Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night" (Mt 2:14), thus revealing his prompt concern for the good of his family. He wasted no time fretting over things he could not control, in order to give full attention to those entrusted to his care. Such thoughtful concern is the sign of a true vocation, the testimony of a life touched by the love of God. What a beautiful example of Christian life we give when we refuse to pursue our ambitions or indulge in our illusions, but instead care for what the Lord has entrusted to us through the Church! God then pours out his Spirit and creativity upon us; he works wonders in us, as he did in Joseph.

Together with God's call, which makes our greatest dreams come true, and our response, which is made up of generous service and attentive care, there is a third characteristic of Saint Joseph's daily life and our Christian vocation, namely fidelity. Joseph is the "righteous man" (Mt 1:19) who daily perseveres in quietly serving God and his plans. At a particularly difficult moment in his life, he thoughtfully considered what to do (cf. v. 20). He did not let himself be hastily pressured. He did not yield to the temptation to act rashly, simply following his instincts or living for the moment. Instead, he pondered things patiently. He knew that success in life is built on constant fidelity to important decisions. This was reflected in his perseverance in plying the trade of a humble carpenter (cf. Mt 13:55), a quiet perseverance that made no news in his own time, yet has inspired the daily lives of countless fathers, labourers and Christians ever since. For a vocation – like life itself – matures only through daily fidelity.



How is such fidelity nurtured? In the light of God's own faithfulness. The first words that Saint Joseph heard in a dream were an invitation not to be afraid, because God remains ever faithful to his promises: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid" (Mt 1:20). Do not be afraid: these words the Lord also addresses to you, dear sister, and to you, dear brother, whenever you feel that, even amid uncertainty and hesitation, you can no longer delay your desire to give your life to him. He repeats these words when, perhaps amid trials and misunderstandings, you seek to follow his will every day, wherever you find yourself. They are words you will hear anew, at every step of your vocation, as you return to your first love. They are a refrain accompanying all those who – like Saint Joseph – say yes to God with their lives, through their fidelity each day.

This fidelity is the secret of joy. A hymn in the liturgy speaks of the "transparent joy" present in the home of Nazareth. It the joy of simplicity, the joy experienced daily by those who care for what truly matters: faithful closeness to God and to our neighbour. ...I pray that you will experience this same joy, dear brothers and sisters who have generously made God the dream of your lives, serving him in your brothers and sisters through a fidelity that is a powerful testimony in an age of ephemeral choices and emotions that bring no lasting joy. May Saint Joseph, protector of vocations, accompany you with his fatherly heart!

# St Joseph's - Colwyn Bay, Wales – Life during the pandemic

In this article Fr. Frank Ryan from the community in Colwyn Bay, Wales shares the challenge of living a life of faith in the midst of the pandemic.

Today, Colwyn Bay would not be compared with the French Riviera but back in 1900 it certainly had all the attributes. It is beside the sea, has beautiful sandy beaches, plenty of fresh air and is convenient to visitors. It has its origins in the industrial revolution, but as a place of refuge for those who wanted to get away from the smog and the challenges of life in Liverpool or Manchester. But that was then, except that it has retained all those healthy attributes.

The legacy of those days has left us with a beautiful church, school and community centre. Over many generations the Catholic community has been renewing itself and adapting to ever changing religious and social situations .... and these days to a pandemic which has challenged everyone, including our youngest children.

One indication of the strength of a community can be judged by how well they respond in a time of crisis. Attendance at Mass was restricted to 40 people, so the services went on-line reaching many thousands via live streaming on Facebook. The church was a safe place due to the dedicated volunteers who successfully organised a track and trace system. Parishioners took full advantage of the availability of Mass and occasionally a 'Church Full' notice had to be placed outside.

The parents and children in our Primary School, like others, were badly disrupted by a programme of opening and closing, and lessons took place on 'Zoom' or 'Teams' which was no substitute for real classroom teaching. Perhaps most concerning of all was the stress caused to teachers - and the presumption that they will just get over it.



A large number of our parishioners work in the health or social services areas. One young Filipino nurse lost his life to covid and the fear of fatal exposure was present in the whole community. Fr. Vimal was ever ready to attend those seriously ill.

North Wales may appear to be an affluent region to many visitors, but poverty is widespread, with 30,000 children alone needing special support. The SVP and St. Joseph Connect food bank rallied around those who were caught short of basic needs. Changes to the benefit system was blamed for much hardship, and fears around BREXIT fuelled a lot of anxiety. On several occasions the local Council and politicians expressed thanks for the contribution our volunteers made.

The pandemic will be remembered for the grief it caused, the businesses that collapsed, the jobs lost, the relationships strained, the isolation of being locked down, and trying to be trendy by wearing a different face mask. While mobile phones and the internet helped reduce the sense of isolation, those gadgets were no substitute for the real thing - each other's presence.



Sometimes religion is seen as just another commodity available to the public, and a church as supplying a special brand. But during the pandemic St. Josephs became more like ‘Teach an pobail’ or the house of the people. Indeed, within its walls there was a special presence - the Divine - being a definite support to those whose aspirations stretched beyond the need for mere human contact. Those who had the feeling of ‘being lost’ i.e. knowing they were in the wrong place and seeking the direction to a place more fulfilling, could find inspiration within the stillness of its walls. Our Eucharistic Ministers found ways to ensure the house bound were not neglected.

Even in Colwyn Bay, even at this time, the words of Pope Francis were finding its effects. *Laudato Si'*, his encyclical on the environment, concentrated our attention on our garden. Gone - were diseased and poisonous trees, including a shrub that caused Lyme disease, in - were plants that attracted little insects, pollinating creatures, and some inducements to our native bird species. Global warming has made life very difficult for them.

In many ways the pandemic has affected our community cohesion. Lockdown has prevented our leadership teams from meeting and has also prevented us from delivering our sacramental programmes. Our finances have been reduced, and expenditure limited to paying for the mere essentials. Our reserves have dwindled. We are conscious of a very sobering and challenging time ahead.

Covid 19 has taught us all a lesson. The fragility of the human person of all ages is threatened by an unseen enemy, that isolates us all, and yet concentrated the best talents and resources that we can muster to defend ourselves. We can now see clearly the illness if one puts the well-being of all at risk. In this battle heroes excel and capture the gratitude of nations. The spiritual resource at the heart of our lives is one of the tools essential in combatting the destructive effects of this hidden enemy.

# A Pandemic Journey to Pentecost

Patti-Anne Kay and Fr. Peter Doherty, OMI find Easter parallels in COVID suffering but recall it was at Pentecost that the fullness of the Resurrection was realized

Let us go about daily activities with a renewed sense of focus, purpose, and appreciation.

The COVID-19 pandemic struck close to home. Finally, at Easter, my husband and I were overjoyed to see two of our grandchildren outdoors, everyone wearing masks. Our grandson asked, “Nanna are you afraid of me?” I wondered, what is it like for a three-year-old to feel that he is dangerous for his grandparents? As for me, I was heartbroken with his worrying and fear.

Father Peter and I have worked together for years in the healing ministry of forgiving as a spiritual practice and help those deal with pain. Crises and pain make us retreat into our shell, or lead to growth just as the followers of Jesus experienced during the Easter season.

We know the Stations of the Cross serve as a way of soul-strengthening and as a springboard for meditation and prayer. It is a surprise for some to discover that the “end” of Lent is a beginning. Your Lenten journey is successful when it brings Easter to life. Because the Stations serve as a spiritual pilgrimage leading to Easter, we will focus on some of the spiritual “themes” in the light of our COVID experience.

The first theme is that spiritual life is both individual and communal. Jesus showed us a mature spirituality; one that is rooted in relationships with others, and with his Heavenly Father. In the past, many of us in the “first world” lived as if we were somehow “separate” and invulnerable. We all have re-discovered the impermanence and unpredictability of our human condition. However, rather than unite us, the pandemic divided us even though the virus has no respect for anyone. Some divided into camps; either denying it all together or refuting medical or scientific advice. Worryingly, those most vulnerable were at greater risk for infection and had fewer resources. Like Jesus, we need prayer to strengthen our relationship with God, and with others.

The second theme is judgement: those who judge and those who are judged. Even though as Christians, we are warned not to judge, during the pandemic, how many have felt they were being judged?

How many judged others based on their culture or race? The spiritual cost of judging is destructive. You cannot build community; it is difficult to see the face of God in others once you’ve passed judgement.

The third theme is “falling.” With our support systems strained during the pandemic, how many of us have fallen from our personal standards through overeating, drinking, or watching too much television? How many of us felt shame, or struggled with guilt, when we lost our patience and lashed out hurting others, especially those we love?

Looking at Jesus, we see that even as we fall, there is hope. Jesus rose after each fall, sometimes with the help of others. Our own “fallings” bring us a sense of humility and help us recognize our vulnerability. At best when we fall this helps develop compassion and be more accepting of others’ vulnerabilities. It inspires us to help others as well as to accept help. COVID led us to rediscover how much we need others; how interdependent we are.

This brings us to the fourth theme; bringing to life the Gospel values. Jesus encountered men and women who expressed their love and solidarity by actively helping, as well as sharing His pain. For example, Veronica dared to help Jesus by wiping the blood from His face. Her tears expressed the pain she felt for Him. Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus by carrying his Cross. These acts, living Gospel values, change lives. Each of us are called to seek opportunities to offer help, and at times, to accept help. Thankfully, even during the pandemic we have seen many acts of kindness that are signs of hope and the Spirit working through us.

The fifth theme is loss; for Jesus, this meant being stripped of his clothes, his dignity, and ultimately his life. During the pandemic, we also felt “stripped.” It was painful not to be able to gather to worship or get together with friends. Like Jesus, we learned what it’s like to not be in control or feel alone, even abandoned.



We see through Jesus the pain of feeling abandoned by his friends and disciples, and at his death saying, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46) We also struggled. Some wondered where is God in this? We learned that being vulnerable and not knowing what is going to happen next is agonizing. We recognize the pain and sense of abandonment for those who had to quarantine alone. We mourn for those who died separated from loved ones and those loved ones who longed to be with them.

We know that God is present even in moments of despair. We are reminded to seek God in our midst no matter what. When Jesus was on the cross, He spoke with the two criminals crucified beside him. One thief rebuked him; the other asked Jesus to remember him in paradise, a clear act of faith. This thief was able to recognize Jesus as God. We pray for the same grace.

The last theme is hope, of resurrection and new life. COVID helped us recognize those privileges we took for granted. We now have greater appreciation of time with loved ones and the importance of friends and family. We have a new appreciation for those in occupations that went unnoticed. We witnessed the bravery of those who worked during the pandemic, even at personal risk.

Like Lent, Easter too is a journey. Easter 2021 was different. So different that some were left wondering if Jesus was still in the tomb? Unlike those first followers who didn't have hope at the Crucifixion, thankfully we do as Scripture gives us hope even in our setbacks and discouragements.

Those present at the first Easter had to grow into their recognition of the resurrected Jesus. In the garden, it wasn't until Jesus spoke her name that Mary Magdalene was able to recognize him. The disciples on the road to Emmaus were able to “see” Jesus only after he broke bread with them. There's a lesson here for us. It is too easy to be filled with despair with news of more deadly COVID variants. We need to be vigilant in our faith, knowing that Christ is present in our sufferings.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were able to “see” Jesus only after he broke bread with them. There's a lesson here for us.

Many of us continue to struggle with concerns such as the safety of vaccines amidst emerging COVID variants; asking “where is God in all this?” If so, have heart; Peter and the disciple that Jesus loved eventually came to see the empty tomb as a sign of the Resurrection. How many of us, like Thomas, long for proof to believe? If so, remember that first Easter was an evolving experience just as Easter is today. It was at Pentecost that the fullness of Easter was realized. For many, Easter 2021 in the shadow of COVID 19 is like the experience of the first Christians. Take heart, that we too may grow in our experience Christ's resurrection and His presence.

Let us go about daily activities with a renewed sense of focus, purpose, and appreciation. Let us move forward with a spirit of gratitude so that no one feels they are a burden, or dangerous to others. As we reach out, let all our actions demonstrate that each person is created in the image and likeness of God.

– Patti-Anne Kay and Peter Doherty, OMI



# Our Lady and the Missionary Oblates

The Marian and missionary orientation of the Missionary Oblates is rooted in the person of their founder, St. Eugene of Mazenod (1782-1861). In this article Fr Thomas explores the important role of Mary in the life of the Oblate story.

## **Marian imprint of Eugene of Mazenod**

In the French noble family, the de Mazenods, there seems already to have been a Marian piety. However, the Jesuit Bartolo Zinelli (1766-1803) had a much greater influence on St. Eugene's religious education than the family. He taught the child in Venice between 1794 and 1797. Zinelli's spirituality was explicitly centered on Christ, who had placed all his trust in the divine Mother. Eugene wrote of this, "In the morning I look at the image of Mary and humbly ask for her maternal blessing."

After the French revolution, in 1802, Eugene de Mazenod, now a young adult, returned from Italian Exile to his French hometown of Aix-en-Provence. Finally, it was the "Good Friday experience", probably in 1807, that was the deciding factor in changing his life. In 1808, he entered the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris. There it was a matter of meditating on the life of Jesus in a contextual devotion to Mary. Jesus must come alive in the life of the priest as it did in the life of his virgin mother. In notes immediately before his ordination to the priesthood he wrote, "My God, multiply my strength a hundredfold, that I may love you, as your holy mother loved you."

## **Priestly activity under the protection of the Blessed Mother**

St. Eugene was ordained a priest on December 21, 1811. From the fall of 1812, the noble clergyman worked in Aix-en-Provence as a pastor of domestic servants, day laborers, prisoners, and the poor. In the same year, he founded a youth association that was to have over 300 members by 1817. It was important to Eugene de Mazenod that the boys saw in the Mother of Jesus, their "own mother" who cares and wants their salvation. When Eugene himself became critically ill in 1814 as a result of his pastoral care for typhoid prisoners of war, the youth association held prayer vigils to the "Miraculous Mother of Graces." Eugene de Mazenod attributed his recovery to Our Lady.

The experience of the illness and the plan of a new apostolate finally led him to found a community of like-minded priests. This happened in Aix-en-Provence on January 25, 1816. At first the community was called "Missionaries of Provence". Only a few days after the foundation, the Fathers set out on their first parish mission. Many other missions followed in Provence in the south of France.



Construction of the Inchicore Grotto in 1928



### Mary, the Mother of the Missionaries

It was clear to the first companions of Eugene de Mazenod that Mary was the “mother of the missionaries”. Devotion to Mary had its place in all missionary activities. At every mission, there was a solemn consecration of the parish to the Blessed Mother. A witness reports: “It was a glorious picture when the missionary stood at the pulpit and consecrated the parish to the Blessed Mother. All eyes were filled with tears, hearts were shaken, and souls were inflamed with love for the Queen of Heaven.”

At the beginning of 1819, Eugene de Mazenod founded a second community for his missionaries at the Marian shrine of Notre-Dame du Laus. Life in two places now required a rule for his religious congregation. In addition to the rosary, the founder prescribed a daily “visitation of the Blessed Virgin” for its members. It was also clear to him that problems within the missionary society must be placed in the “hands of the Holy Virgin”.

An extraordinary event occurred on August 15, 1822, when Eugene de Mazenod was praying in the Oblate chapel in Aix before a new statue of Mary Immaculate. It is said that the Holy Virgin smiled at him. To this, he wrote, “If only I could tell you all the consolations I felt that day.” St. Eugene, through this mystical experience, concluded that the congregation he founded was willed by God and therefore would have a future. Again, Our Lady was the one who showed God’s ways.



Notre Dame De Laus

### The Name “Missionaries Oblates of the Immaculate Virgin Mary”

When the growing community had extended its field of activity far beyond Provence, the name “Missionaries of Provence” no longer seemed appropriate. At the end of 1825, Eugene de Mazenod traveled to Rome to obtain officially the church’s approbation. On December 20, he was received by Pope Leo XII (1823-1829). The name of the new Congregation, from now on offering its services to the universal church, was to be “Missionary Oblates of the Immaculate Virgin Mary.” On March 20, 1826, St. Eugene enthusiastically wrote to his brother Oblates, “Does it not seem to you that it is a sign of election to bear the name of Oblates of Mary? It is the Church that has given us this beautiful title; we receive it with gratitude, proud of our dignity that it gives us under the protection of the Almighty before God.”

### Marian Devotion for today

Since those early year, Oblates have continued to identify themselves with Mary and her willingness to place herself unreservedly as the service of God’s plan of salvation. It was the spiritual desire of St Eugene that his Oblates, like the Virgin Mary, “bear” God to the world.

Eugene de Mazenod’s Marian spirituality was clearly linked with his missionary zeal. To this day, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and all their associates, and friends are concerned with “giving birth to Christ” in our world through the proclamation of the Word, sharing faith and the everyday witnessing and living of our Christian faith. This was for St. Eugene the deepest meaning of the mission and Marian devotion.

– Thomas Klosterkamp, OMI



# India's Second Wave

India's deadly Covid-19 second wave has devastated big cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Lucknow, Pune, Chennai and Bengaluru. Hospitals and crematoriums have run out of space, and funerals are taking place in car parks. But the pandemic has also firmly gripped many smaller cities, towns, and villages, where the devastation is largely under-reported.

People spend many hours taking their kith and kin from one hospital to another in autos, and bikes, as the people cannot get an ambulance or any other vehicles. Once they reach the hospitals, the hospital administration washes its hands, saying there are no beds available, ventilators are running short, pharmacies are empty, and even if they have medicines, they are unaffordable by a normal or even a middle-class family. Thus, the people leave ultimately everything to fate and come home leaving the patients in the corridors and whatever spaces may be available in the hospital.

The hospitals, when they don't find a place for patients with the virus, send you back home to care for yourselves with prescribed medicines we need to buy ourselves. And, when people go to buy medicine in pharmacies, either it is very costly (which even a middle-class family can't afford) or not available at all. A son who had taken his father to the hospital and returned without getting a bed for him, cries on TV news as follows: "I am giving him medicines at home, but I am not sure that he will survive".

We have been left to die on the streets. He says several private hospitals even "conned" him and took money to do tests, only to tell him later to take his father away as there were no beds. "I am not a wealthy person. I spent whatever I had to pay the auto driver and the hospitals. Now I am going to borrow some money to get an oxygen cylinder at home." Such stories have become common in Delhi, the worst affected city in India, and other metropolitan cities, but similar accounts are now coming in from smaller cities and towns across the country.





A Covid-19 patient waits to be given oxygen for his breathing difficulties outside a government-run hospital in Jammu

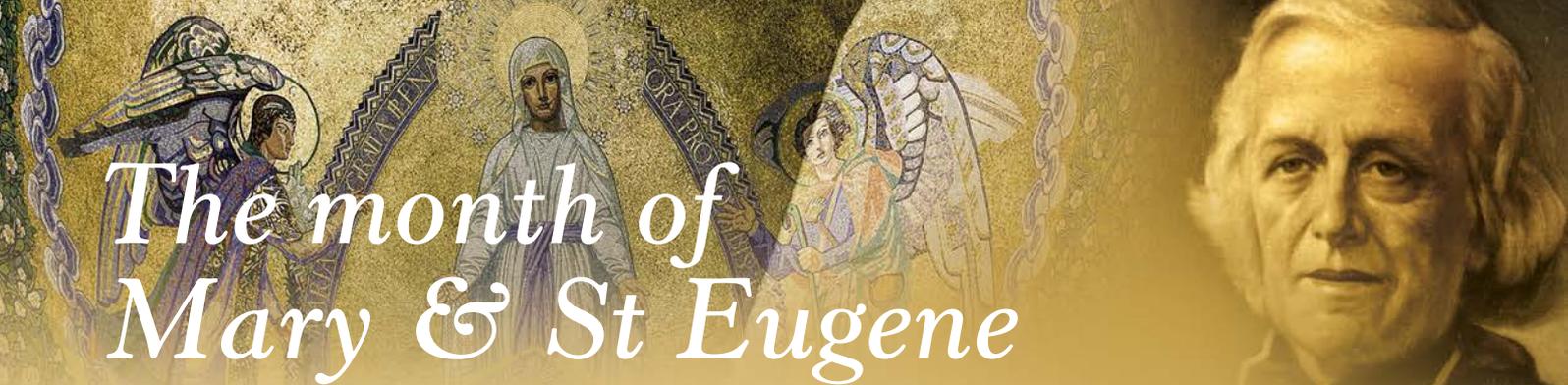
All the more, the government has ordered that the ‘Remdesivir Injection’, can only be sold by the Government in Government hospitals. Relatives need to stand in line for hours, and sometimes for days, without food and drink, and some lose their lives from dehydration, etc. This has become common if you watch the news on India, and while it could be the same elsewhere on the globe, to see it is really devastating.

The Oblates were not exempt from the infection of this deadly virus. Several Oblates in India are infected with this virus, a few have recovered from it with great difficulties, and some have been treated in home quarantine with medicines prescribed by hospitals. A few others have not been able to get beds. Thus we need to wait for days to get a place in the hospitals. At least for now, the number of the Oblates has risen to 8 seriously infected and hospitalized and some others in home quarantine. Several Oblate students and brothers are being treated with medications, with ‘Ayurveda’ remedies in the communities themselves, as neither beds nor resources are available for us in this sudden devastating increase of this deadly virus in the second wave.

**“I am not a wealthy person. I spent whatever I had to pay the auto driver and the hospitals. Now I am going to borrow some money to get an oxygen cylinder at home.”**

In the first wave, Oblates concentrated primarily outside of our communities to help the people affected, but now, in the second wave, we need to concentrate both within our communities who need help and outside for the people who are really struggling for their livelihood and survival, physically, mentally and medically. We too, as the people do here leave it to God Almighty to take care of the Oblates and people in his abundant mercy and compassion.

– Fr.Varam Anthonyswamy, OMI  
St. Eugene Province, India



# The month of Mary & St Eugene

## **We come this year to the feast of St Eugene in an unusual frame of mind...**

We have an Argentinian, Church-changing Pope - Francis I, - may he be with us for many more years! - and a life-changing pandemic - Covid19, which we want to see the back of. We have had President Trump. For better or for worse we have Brexit. We have a new consciousness of the climate change crisis, and Greta Thunberg. We have problems of racism and migration and intolerance, bad memories of slavery & colonialism.

In this turbulent situation, we are ripe for something new – and something new is on the horizon. Pope Francis is calling us to move towards a synodal church. If he is to get his wish then we, along with the whole Church, will have to engage in the process. For, in the spirit of St Eugene, our identity as Oblates is inescapably bound up with that of the Church which he loved with his whole heart.

At such a time as this, in the month of Mary and St Eugene, and in poverty of spirit, we are invited to seek out the Holy Spirit again in places where it came to meet us in the past. It was a Spirit initially addressed to a group of priests, but it was soon seen to include Brothers and, in our days, the friends of St Eugene and a multitude of other associated groups.

The Spirit was flowing in abundance when young and not-long-ordained Fr De Mazenod was moved to set up his society of priests in Aix in the south of France. It is, he wrote to a friend, *“the second time in my life that I see myself moved to resolve something of the utmost seriousness as if by a strong impulse from without”*. And he wrote these lines to a parish priest, the young Fr Tempier:

*“My dear friend, read this letter at the foot of your crucifix with a mind to heed only God and what is demanded in the interests of his glory and of the salvation of souls from a priest like yourself. Stifle the voice of cupidity, love of comfort and convenience; dwell deeply on the plight of our country people, their religious situation, the apostasy that daily spreads wider with dreadfully ravaging effects. Look at the feebleness of the means employed to date to oppose this flood of evil; ask your heart what it fain would do to counter these disasters and then reply to my letter. Well, dear man, what I say to you, without going fully into details, is that you are necessary for the work which the Lord inspires us to undertake..”*

*Happiness awaits us in this holy Society which will have but one heart and soul...*

*When I shall have your reply, I will give you all the details you could wish for. But, dear friend, I conjure you, do not let yourself say no to the greatest good that may possibly be done in the Church...*

*All depends on how we begin. We need perfect unanimity of sentiments, the same goodwill, the same disinterestedness, the same devotedness - that sums it up...”*

I invite you to ponder on this text to find again the Spirit that moved the young Eugene: a Spirit that filled him with a love of the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church, with awareness of people’s need for salvation, with a spirit of love and determination, a spirit of courage, with conviction and a vision of how to set about his mission. It is a Spirit that confidently invites others to join in!

Another text to ponder:

*What more sublime purpose than that of their Institute? Their founder is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God; their first fathers are the Apostles. They are called to be the Saviour’s co-workers, the co-redeemers of mankind; and even though, because of their present small number and the more urgent needs of the people around them, they have to limit the scope of their zeal, for the time being, to the poor of our countryside and others; their ambition should, in its holy aspirations, embrace the vast expanse of the whole earth. (1818)*

Whatever precisely is meant by ‘synodal church’ will unfold as various synods take place, at diocesan and higher levels. It certainly seems to promise a more collaborative church, a church in which all gifts are respected and flourish, above all in which leaders show ‘respect’ for all talents and work in harmony with the whole body.

I think I can safely say that no Oblate today will have any difficulty with the idea of accepting this style of being Church. Certainly in these islands, it is the style we have had in our hearts for a long time – whatever may be said about our attainment of this ideal. I often felt, when we were on pilgrimage in Lourdes and celebrating the Eucharist for the sick in the open air at St Bernadette’s altar, that this was the complete ▶



# Fr. James Hughes, O.M.I and the Belfast Blitz 1941

– From the Archives

On Easter Tuesday, 15 April 1941, Fr. James Hughes, O.M.I. was visiting his sister in Belfast. On that evening, over 200 German bombers targeted the city and its large shipyard and aircraft manufacturing bases. The city was unprepared and undefended. The attack began in the late evening and lasted until 5.00am on the morning of the 16 April. The residential district in which he was staying was heavily bombed. In the DeMazenod Record, it was reported that 'he gathered all the members of the household around him, recited the Act of Contrition, gave them absolution and then ceaselessly recited the rosary for some four hours'. Fr. Hughes had been suffering with heart failure and the stress caused him to collapse and die. A priest was sent for and was able to administer the Last Sacrament to him. Requiem Mass was offered in the Church of St. Theresa, Belfast and his remains were removed to Inchicore, where Solemn Requiem Mass was sung on Friday, 18 April 1941. He is buried in the Oblate Cemetery in Inchicore. His relatives survived the bombing. In total just under 1,000 people died and many churches, hospitals, schools and major buildings were destroyed.

Father James Hughes, O.M.I. was born in Belfast, on 14 June 1884. He attended St. Malachy's College, Belfast and was received as a novice at Belmont House, Stillorgan, Dublin, on 7 December 1905. He made his first vows on 8 December 1906 and his final vows on 15 August 1908. He went to Liege, Belgium for his theological studies and was ordained at Liege in 1912 by Archbishop Dontenwill, O.M.I., Superior General. His first obedience for the Anglo-Irish Province was to St. Anne's Parish, Rock Ferry, Cheshire as his first mission. Whilst there he met



A map of north-east Belfast from a Luftwaffe Target Folder showing vulnerable Luftwaffe targets marked in red pen

with an accident and injured his back and had to retire from the mission for a few years. Whilst on a pilgrimage to Lourdes, he recovered from his injuries and ever after practised a great devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes. He returned to parochial work in 1920 to New Priory, Kilburn and then in 1921, to Colwyn bay as Rector and in 1923, went to Glenree Reformatory as Superior. His management of the school proved to be difficult as The Great War and the Irish Civil War had crippling consequences for the upkeep of the school. In 1926, Fr. Hughes went to join the staff at Mount St. Mary's, Leeds, where he spent the next three years. In 1929, he came to reside at The Retreat House, Inchicore, Dublin where he spent the rest of his life to the work of preaching Missions and Retreats throughout Ireland and Great Britain. The DeMazenod Record, states that 'As a preacher he was very well known and developed a fine style of pulpit oratory. As a companion he was charming, recounting anecdotes in an inimitable manner. He had a deep fund of humour and common-sense and will be greatly missed by his fellow Oblates'.

- ▶ expression of who the Church is: around the altar were the pilgrims, the sick ones at their heart, and all their nurses and carers, the large mixed choir, the liturgy directed from a lectern by a lay OMI helper, with lay readers and acolytes, a group of concelebrating Oblate priests on pilgrimage, with perhaps some visiting priests, and all gently presided over

by Bishop Field, and pulling in people from other pilgrim groups or just people on their own, drawn by the singing and the magnetism of the Spirit. A 'field hospital' indeed! A unity in a rich diversity!

Whatever the future holds, the Easter season liturgy constantly reminds us that the Lord is always with us.

- Michael Hughes OMI

# Upcoming Events at Wistaston Hall



## Foresters – Spirituality for Our Wisdom Years

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

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

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

For more information please visit [www.orc-crewe.org](http://www.orc-crewe.org)  
or phone Rachel on +44 1270 568653

## Reading the Signs of the Times

– Responding to the Events of the last 18 months

5th – 7th November 2021 £150.00 per person  
*Led by David Wells*

In March 2020 Pope Francis gave the world his blessing lamenting the signs of the times.

"Dark clouds have descended over a closed world" he writes. How are we to understand these perplexing times and what can we learn from them? Exploring the teaching of Pope Francis, we will reflect not only on the struggles we have endured but also the blessings in disguise we have received. We will consider what the Pandemic has taught us and why we can't simply go back to how it all once was, the "normal" that we knew before.

## Oblate Mission Shop

[www.oblates.ie/mission-shop](http://www.oblates.ie/mission-shop)

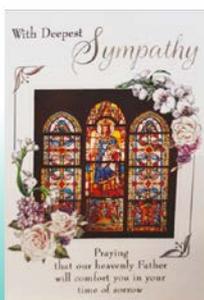
### Mass Cards for the Deceased



Perpetual Mass Card



Single Mass Card



€4.00  
order online



Get Well Card

€1.95 Post and packaging per order

Cards for other occasions are also available

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](mailto:pim@oblates.co.uk)

[Return to Contents Page](#)



printed on paper from  
a sustainable source