

OBLATE CONNECTIONS

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Missionary Oblates
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CONNECTIONS

On February 17th the Oblates celebrate another “foundation” - the anniversary of the day that Pope Leo XII approved their Rule of Life. Yet as Fr Mike Hughes said “for St Eugene, the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was not himself but Jesus Christ. He and his men were called to be co-workers with Jesus in the very same work that Jesus undertook when he came on earth. The model of the missionary, said Eugene, must be Jesus the missionary. And his Twelve Apostles too. They lived and journeyed with Jesus on the roads of Galilee, Samaria, Judea, preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God. The life Jesus and the Twelve shared together is religious life as St. Eugene understood it.”

The articles in this issue cover the living of the Oblate mission in London, Lourdes, Hong Kong and the Ukraine. Yet despite their spread all around the globe they are united by sharing the same Oblate Rule of Life. So on this anniversary of our “foundation” let us pray that all members of our Oblate family will be united in

our shared mission and have the courage to walk the paths trodden by so many apostles before us.

As we prepare to enter the season of Lent let us remember the words of Pope Francis: Each year during Lent we are reminded that “goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day.” Let us ask God to give us the patient perseverance of the farmer, and to persevere in doing good, one step at a time. If we fall, let us stretch out our hand to the Father, who always lifts us up.

Finally in the coming months we will mark the 140th anniversary of the first Oblate led pilgrimage to Lourdes, let us pray that Our Lady will continue to watch over us so that this season of Lenten renewal may bring forth signs of new life in all God’s people.

- Fr. Lorcán O’Reilly OMI



“To put on ashes, to sit in ashes, is to say publicly and to yourself that you are in a penitential mode, that this is not “ordinary time”.”



“We are on a journey as Pilgrims. We do not travel alone.”

A word from Fr. Oliver Barry, OMI

As an Oblate Family we are on a journey. This has been the truth of the People of God from ancient times. I constantly think of the Church in our times as being like the people of Israel who left Egypt in search of the Promised Land. Their journey took a long time, they wandered in the desert for many years, they had many troubles along the way. Ultimately, they were led by faith. The Church as we have known it has been through a period of stability which no longer prevails. We are on a journey as Pilgrims. We do not travel alone. We travel with our Partners. Like Moses we may not be the ones to complete the journey. Moses had to stand back and let the people continue. We too have to trust the leadership of others to continue the journey.



The year 2022 was an eventful year for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. At an international level we held an international Congress of Lay Associations during May and the 37th General Chapter of the congregation during September and October. At a local level Oblates across the Globe have continued to bring the message of the Gospel to many difficult and tragic situations. We think particularly of the Oblates in Ukraine, Haiti, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nigeria. At home the Oblate Mission continues as we endeavour to prepare for a future in an increasingly secularised reality. During 2023 may we develop our partnership and take further steps as we move forward together in bringing the Good News to our World and particularly to those on the margins of Church and society.

- Fr. Oliver Barry OMI,
Province Leader



We enter the season of Lent by putting ashes on our foreheads. What's symbolized here? Perhaps the heart understands better than the head because more people go to church on Ash Wednesday than on any other day of the year, including Christmas. The queues to receive the ashes in many churches are endless. Why? Why are the ashes so popular?

Their popularity, I suspect, comes from the fact that, as a symbol, ashes are blunt, primal, archetypal, and speak the language of the soul.

Something inside of us knows exactly why we take the ashes. No doctor of any kind needs to explain this. Ashes are dust, soil, humus; humanity and humility come from these. Ashes have always been a major symbol inside all religions. To put on ashes, to sit in ashes, is to say publicly and to yourself that you are in a penitential mode, that this is not "ordinary time" for you. Smudging oneself with ashes says that this is not a season of celebration for you, that some important work is going on inside you, and that you are, metaphorically and really, in the cinders of a dead fire, waiting for something fuller in your life.

All of this has deep roots. There's something innate in the human soul that understands, understands that every so often, one must descend, be smudged, lose one's luster, and wait for ashes to do their silent work. All ancient traditions, be they religious or mythical, abound with stories of having to sit in the ashes. For example, we all know the story of Cinderella. This is a centuries-old, wisdom-tale that speaks about the value of ashes in life. The name Cinderella itself speaks to this. Literally, the name Cinderella means, "the young girl who sits in the cinders, the ashes." Moreover, as the tale makes plain, before the glass slipper is placed on her foot, before wearing the beautiful gown, before going to the ball, before dancing with the prince, and before marrying him, there must first be a period of sitting in the cinders, of being humbled, of being waiting patiently, while you are being readied for a sublime joy and consummation. In the story of Cinderella, we can see a spirituality of Lent.

LENTEN ASHES

– Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Native American traditions too have always had an important place for ashes. In some Indigenous communities, there was the concept that occasionally someone would have to spend time in the ashes. Nobody knew why a specific person was called at a particular moment to sit in the ashes, but everyone knew that this was a natural thing, that ashes do an important work in the soul, and that eventually that person would return to his or her regular life and be better for having spent time in the ashes.

To offer one example: Certain native communities used to live in what they called longhouses. A longhouse was the communal building, in effect, the house for the whole community. A longhouse was long, rectangular, with large sloping sides, with the centre of the roof open so that this could function as a natural chimney. Fires were kept burning, both for cooking and for warmth, along the entire centre of the longhouse. People gathered there, near the fires, to cook, eat, and socialize, but they slept away from the fires, under the roofs that sloped down either side of the open centre. Every so often, a man or a woman for reasons they didn't have to explain, would cease adhering to the normal routine. Instead, he or she would, become silent, sit just off the fire in the ashes, eat very sparingly, not social, not go outside, not wash, and not go to bed with the others, but simply sit in the cinders.

“There’s something innate in the human soul that understands, understands that every so often, one must descend, be smudged, lose one’s luster, and wait for ashes to do their silent work.”



Today we would probably diagnose this as clinical depression and rush that person off for professional help. For their part, they didn't panic. They saw this as perfectly normal, something most everyone was called upon to do at one time or another. They simply let the person sit there in the ashes until one day he or she got up, washed the ashes off, and began again to live a regular life. The belief was that the ashes, that period of silent sitting, had done some important, unseen work inside of the person. You sit in the ashes for healing.

The church taps into these deep wells of wisdom when it puts ashes on our foreheads at the beginning of Lent. Lent is a season for each of us to sit in the ashes, to spend our time, like Cinderella, working and sitting among the ashes, grieving some of the things we've done wrong, refraining from the dance, refraining from the banquet, refusing to do business as usual, but rather waiting in patience as some silent growth takes place within us. Lent is a time to be still so that the ashes can do their work.

And we need not understand exactly what the ashes are doing. They have a long history of being very patient with us.

Sunday Reflections



Each week a reflection on the Sunday Readings is published on our website oblates.ie

These reflections are prepared by Fr. Brian Maher OMI who writes: "A Gospel reflection is no more than one person's response to the Gospel. We can each respond in our own way and in our daily lives."

If you would like to receive the reflection please sign up online or email communications@oblates.ie

If you have any comments, questions or thoughts on the weekly scripture reflection, please feel welcome to email Fr. Brian at b.maher@oblates.ie



FR CHICHO

Fr. Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso, the new leader of the worldwide Oblate family, visited the Delegation of Ukraine from the 3rd to the 9th of December 2022. Better known as Fr Chicho, he visited many Oblate communities and parishes in Ukraine...

On his journey he was accompanied by the Provincial of Poland, Fr. Paweł ZAJĄC, and the superior of the Ukraine Delegation, Fr. Vitaly Podolyana. In each Oblate community he participated in the Eucharist, listened to the Oblates in fraternal meetings, and expressed his fullest support in this difficult situation, where people undergo immense pain and suffering.

Among the various places visited a significant moment was the time spent in Chernihiv, a city that withstood a siege of almost 6 weeks. Accompanied by Fr. Petro Vrublevsky, Fr. Chicho had the opportunity to see with his own eyes the destruction caused by shelling and battles with the aggressor. The Oblates remained in the city despite the continuous shelling, and their monastery became a place of refuge for the local population. In the underground, they ate together, slept, prayed, and celebrated the Eucharist together. During the community meeting, the Fr. Chicho took time to listen to the testimony of the missionaries. He also visited Chernihiv parishioners who shared with him their dreadful memories.

Among other visits, Fr. Chicho met the Oblates who serve in the parish of St. Nicholas in Kyiv and participated in the Holy Eucharist on the feast of St. Nicholas. Despite the bomb alerts, many parishioners came to the church to thank God for His protection and to express gratitude to the Oblate missionaries for their uninterrupted presence during the Russian aggression. In his address to the faithful, Fr. Chicho said: I am proud of the work of my Oblate confreres in Ukraine,



that they stayed with the people in such difficult times, that they are with you and close to you. When I was elected Superior General of our Congregation, flying from the Western Sahara to the General Chapter since I was not a participant in the Chapter, I immediately wanted to visit my fellow Oblates in Ukraine and their places of ministry in a country afflicted by the wounds of war.

During his visit, Fr. Chicho took time to meet with the displaced from different regions. He also did not forget to speak over the phone with some fellow Oblates from the occupied territories, as there was no possibility of visiting them.

The Oblate missionaries in Ukraine were full of appreciation for the new leader of the Congregation for choosing the Ukraine as the place of his first pastoral visit, and expressing solidarity with the suffering people of Ukraine.

- Originally published on omiworld.org



VISITS UKRAINE



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"May young people's evangelization be active and missionary, for this is how they will recognize and witness the presence of the living Christ." Pope Francis



PROTECTING OUR

According to Pope Francis there are many simple and creative ways “to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations” (Laudato Si’ 67). The following list of suggestions might help us take action close to home...

Organize or participate in a clean-up

Whether it’s a big group event or a solo clean-up, you can get involved anywhere. Plan your own, or find one in your local area and become part of a worldwide campaign to remove billions of pieces of trash from neighbourhoods, beaches, rivers, lakes, trails, and parks. It’s vital that we reduce waste and plastic pollution, improve habitats, and prevent harm to all members of God’s creation.

Enjoy your leftovers

About 17 percent of global food production may go wasted, according to the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP) Food Waste Index Report 2021, and estimates suggest that 8-10 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions are associated with unconsumed food. To cut back on food waste, learn to love leftovers and creatively give them a new life!

Compost

Start composting to use those leftovers you can’t consume. While diverting food from landfills, composting helps enrich soil, promotes plant growth, filters and uses rainwater, and decreases greenhouse gasses. You can compost anywhere!

Frequent your local farmers market

Supporting a local farmers market is a delicious way to support and preserve God’s creation, especially farmers and artisans in your community. It also reduces transportation pollution and cuts back on trash and plastic bag usage, since produce is minimally packaged.



COMMON HOME

“About 17 percent of global food production may go wasted, according to the United Nations Environment Programme”

Meatless Mondays

Join the Meatless Monday campaign. This helpful website, among others, offers plant-based recipes and guides to help you implement Meatless Monday in your school, hospital, workplace, and community. Try going one step further and make meatless Fridays a part of the whole year, as opposed to something you do just during Lent. Fasting from meat benefits your health and helps the environment by cutting back on greenhouse gasses.

Shop second-hand

Shopping second-hand helps keep items out of landfills and conserves water. It's also a creative way to care for the environment. Plus, it is easier to find classic, sustainable, and unique thrifted pieces rather than relying on the fashion industry that pushes cheap and ever-changing fads. You could also start a swap-circle with your closest friends!

Make “seed bombs”

Whether it's a plant pot, flowerbed, wild patch in your lawn, or an entire meadow, sowing wildflowers provides vital resources to support a wide range of insects that wouldn't otherwise survive in urban areas. Going for a walk and throwing them, or digging “seed bombs” into your garden is a great way to spend an afternoon! The website wildlifetrust.org offers suggestions on how to make a seed bomb.

- Drawn from material prepared by the Laudato Si' Movement and the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development





New Beginnings in Kilburn

The community in Kilburn is a diverse international family. Each member of the parish brings with them their own culture and traditions and the parish strives to cherish each of these.

Like many parish communities the parishes in Kilburn and West Kilburn have been slowing rebuilding and striving to respond to the needs of the present moment. A 'sanctuary' open to all, like any other Parish, we are called to reach out to everyone, without exception, and to remember that the poor and excluded must always have a privileged place in the heart of the Church. During the month of January, we have been privileged to be part of a parish that is coming alive again after the pandemic. This is just a flavour of some of our activities and they all took place in just one week!

On Sunday January 22nd we witnessed a very beautiful and colourful celebration with the Filipino Community as they came together to celebrate the feast of Santo Nino, or the Holy Child. During the Liturgy people danced around ten church we welcomed in the statue. Many people brought their own statues with them which they wanted blessing. After the Eucharist, there was an evening of celebration in the Community Centre.

On Wednesday January 25th 75 members of the Young at Heart Club travelled up to the Chinese Restaurant called Wing YIP to celebrate Chinese New Year. It was a great evening of amazing food and community building.





On Friday January 27th we held our annual Volunteers Evening with representatives from both parishes in Kilburn. We celebrated the Eucharist and then went into the Community Centre for food and an evening of dancing. During the evening we distributed forms asking people to volunteer for a variety of ministries in the community. Over the coming weeks we will continue to encourage people to volunteer in many areas of parish life.

As mentioned one of the strengths of the community in Kilburn is its diversity. We have people attending Eucharist from over 64 different countries around the world. On Sunday January 29th we held our international Mass, an opportunity to celebrate the rich tapestry which is Kilburn. People came along in their national costume, their county colours or even their football team colours. It was a beautiful gathering. We continued our celebrations in the Community Centre with international food and a disco.



The parish community continues to respond to Oblate Mission to reach out to those who are on the margins of church and society. A very tangible sign of this is the ongoing food bank which feeds so many people who are struggling during the cost of living crisis. As it strives to be with people who are in need at the beginning of February, we are planning a new venture as we begin a group we are calling "The Haven". This group is being set up to offer support to those affected by the death of a child, regardless of age or length of time since the death. It is hoped that this group will respond to a need in the community to provide a safe place, or a haven, for parents who don't feel they can talk about the death of their child comfortably in front of family or friends.

As we look to future we remember that our parish, like all others, is called upon to read the signs of the times. As Pope Francis reminds us, the example of a Christian life and the proclamation of Christ are inseparable. One is at the service of the other. They are the two lungs with which any community must breathe, if it is to be missionary. ...The Church must constantly keep pressing forward, beyond her own confines, in order to testify to all the love of Christ"

- Fr. Terry Murray, OMI



FIRST HONG KONG-BORN OBLATE ORDAINED

Father Dominic Fung King-ho of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate was ordained a priest by Bishop Stephen Chow Sau Yan, sj, on December 3 at the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception, Caine Road. He is the first Oblate priest to have been born and raised in Hong Kong since the congregation came to Hong Kong in 1966.

Bishop Chow, completing the first year of his episcopacy, expressed his happiness at the ordination of Father Fung, whom he first ordained a deacon year ago. Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, the former Bishop of Hong Kong; Father Christian Fini, Provincial Superior of the Oblates of the Australian Province; Father Kalisz, Delegation Superior and over 20 Oblates and other priests concelebrated the liturgy.

The liturgy began with Father Kalisz recommending Deacon Fung to the bishop for the order of priesthood. The bishop then explained the priestly duties to the elect. Fung professed before the congregation to be committed to his duties to follow Jesus Christ, shepherd the flock, proclaim the gospel, and be obedient to his bishop and superiors. Bishop Chow and the concelebrating clergy prayed for the elect through the imposition of hands after the choir led the congregation in singing the litany of the saints.

As the newly ordained knelt before the bishop in priestly vestments, Bishop Chow anointed his palms with holy Chrism, consecrating them to serve the people by administering the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. His parents brought the chalice and the ciborium to the bishop, who offered them to the newly ordained, reminding him to conform his life to the mystery of the Lord's Cross.



“My anointed hands belong to God and every one of you. Let me serve you all, and this is my mission. Let’s accept this grace together and serve the Church in our own positions. I am not afraid of showing my weaknesses as in weaknesses we can see the power of God,”

Father Fini thanked Bishop Chow for supporting the Oblates in the diocese and congratulated Father Kalisz for having a new priest after years of encouraging vocations and the formation of young people, following the spirit of their founder, St. Eugene de Mazenod. He also congratulated Father Fung on answering God’s call. “Love the people of God, and allow the poor as the compass to your journey as a priest. With those two things, you will never go wrong,” was his advice to the newly ordained, encouraging him to be dedicated to community life and the mission of evangelising the poor. Father Kalisz said it was a special day as the first Oblate priest born and raised in Hong Kong was ordained that day. He encouraged Father Fung to be close to the poor, respect their values and wishes, and look for new ways to convey God’s words into their hearts.



Father Fung was overcome with emotion as he expressed gratitude to God and the people who stood by him during his vocation journey. He found it hard to believe that God showered him this great blessing to be his priest. He acknowledged that he could not have responded to the vocation alone without assistance from many others. He especially thanked the Oblate brothers for their acceptance and fraternal love, family and friends for their support, spiritual directors for their good examples and the formators in the Philippines and Hong Kong. He had special words of gratitude for Cardinal Zen for showing him how to love the least by his example.



The father of the newly ordained said he was grateful for the priestly vocation of his son and his formation in the congregation. As Father Fung is his only child, he felt a bit reluctant when his son shared his decision to discern his vocation. But after some consideration, he thought he should let him choose the path he loves.

A number of young people from Hong Kong have responded to their vocations in recent years and joined the Oblates. One will make his perpetual vow as an Oblate brother next year, while two more seminarians are receiving training in the Philippines. Father Kalisz said the Oblates will keep encouraging young people to respond to their vocations with good examples, cultivating a sense of belonging to the Church and serving the poor.

He thanked his parents, who taught him to be sensitive to the needs of others and be generous to others. “My anointed hands belong to God and every one of you. Let me serve you all, and this is my mission. Let’s accept this grace together and serve the Church in our own positions. I am not afraid of showing my weaknesses as in weaknesses we can see the power of God,” he said.

- Originally published on www.examiner.org.hk

1883 Pilgrimage to Lourdes

In 1883 the Oblates led their first pilgrimage to Lourdes. From May 21-24 a total of 310 Pilgrims travelled. A report in the *Annals of Our Lady of Lourdes* gives an account of this pilgrimage which was organised by Father William Ring OMI and he was joined in his endeavour by many other Oblate priests and brothers.

The pilgrims were more than three hundred and among them were men like the Duke of Norfolk, Lord Denbeigh, Lord Arundel, Lord Harries, aristocratic women, models of simplicity and charity, converts (to Catholicism) who, by accepting the Catholic faith, had sacrificed all their personal fortunes and close relations and family. They were more than three hundred and they came from: England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India. They were more than three hundred and they represented a million associates, of whom almost one hundred thousand had sent their written intentions and all remained united in prayer and communion with the pilgrims. The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster had approved and given his blessing to their pilgrimage and, during their stay in Lourdes, His Eminence sent them his blessing, after offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for them.

Also, when, led by the Reverend Father Ring, Provincial of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, they went up, for the first time, in procession to the Basilica, under the richly ornate banner of St. George, carried by His Grace the Duke of Norfolk, a thrill of emotion passed through the hearts of those attending and tears were flowing. The hearts, advancing the time so desired, believed to be taking part in the dream of Catholic England and foreseeing the Kingdom of God brought by her fleet to the ends of the earth. The pilgrims celebrated a Triduum of Reparation and of Supplication.

Each morning, they received Holy Communion, they had Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the afternoon and in the evening a time of prayer at the Grotto. To their calm dignity, they added punctuality that was maintained each day. Everyone attended all the exercises; everyone took part in the prayers and the singing. Nothing was more beautiful than the recitation of the Rosary each evening at the Grotto and their solemn and sorrowful singing of the Miserere with lighted candles; nothing was more touching than their prayers for the sick in front of the Baths; arms outstretched, kissing the ground, they appeared untouched by all distractions like to human respect.

The Reverend Father Ring always spoke to them, he spoke with a great apostolic freedom; they listened to him with a respectful deference which is one of the strengths of Great Britain. They were an elite, a people set apart.

On the evening before their departure, they came together in the Basilica for their last Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; two tables were covered with votive offerings (ex-votes) and letters or petitions. They distributed the petitions, the letters and the ex-votos, carrying them in procession to the Grotto and placed them on the altar. In the evening they held their own Torchlight Procession; it was a triumphant prayer following the atonement and supplication.

The following day, they received Holy Communion a last time at the Grotto and received the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Oh, how so many generous promises went up to the Blessed Virgin ! The Reverend Father Ring put forward the suggestion to the pilgrims that they recite the Rosary each day until the month of May next year: all raised their hands in agreement. The contemplation was complete; one could feel that these pilgrims embraced in prayer once again more fervently their entire families and a great nation.

In an air of solemnity, Rosary beads in hand, they dragged themselves from the Grotto only to go to bathe their sick pilgrims, to pray once again at the Baths, on their knees, arms outstretched, in the presence of numerous pilgrims who were drawn by the Solemnity of Corpus Christi (Fete-Dieu in French) and who never tired of admiring this simple and intense piety.

The pilgrims left their wonderful banner of St. George; all said to her "See you again" (au revoir) and made a solemn promise that their next pilgrimage would last at least eight days. One believes they are confident that healings were obtained, but there is little

to compare to the effect on morale that the pilgrims produced on the whole of England and which will continue to grow. England came to meet, at Lourdes, the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Immaculate Queen; Our Lady of Lourdes will bring forward the moment where England will become again, according to the promise of the pilgrims, one of the brightest jewels in the crown of Holy Church.

– Originally published in Mission des Oblats, 1883 & Translated by Fr. Liam Griffin OMI



RETREAT OPPORTUNITIES IN CREWE

Lenten Weekend

17th – 19th March Suggested donation £165.00

Our Lenten retreat is an opportunity to reflect on our own lives as we prepare our hearts to commemorate and celebrate the mystery of Easter. We hope you will join with us to pause and reflect on the last days and death of Jesus and we prepare our hearts to joyfully greet the Risen Christ on Easter morning.

Celebrate Easter

6th – 9th April Suggested donation £245

Discover the Sacred "Three Days" leading up to Easter. Beginning at 6pm on Holy Thursday with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the Washing of the Feet. It includes time for personal and communal prayer as well as the opportunity to fully participate in each of the services.

Building Bridges

5th – 7th May 2022 Suggested donation £165.00

Differences and conflicts are a normal and an inevitable part of our daily lives. How we deal with difference influences whether outcomes of our conflicts are constructive or destructive. During our time together we will see how we can develop our own skills by looking at the themes of communication, active listening, and negotiation.



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6th – 10th March Suggested donation - £235

An individually guided retreat gives you the time and opportunity to spend some time alone and with God. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on the "things that matter" in your life and to deepen your relationship with God. An IGR helps you to be more aware of how God works in your life and it allows you to become more aware of the many ways God is present to you.



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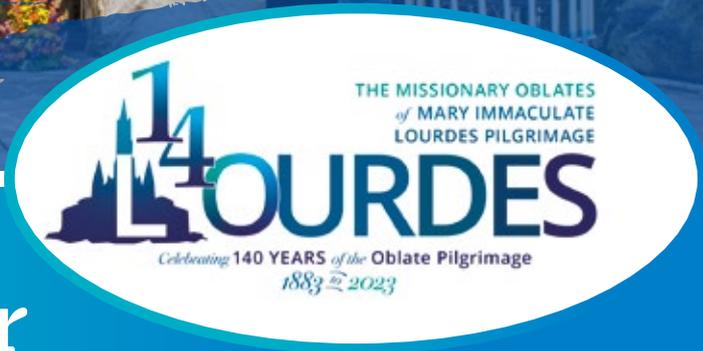
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Lourdes 2023



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