



OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE, ANGLO-IRISH PROVINCE

Refounding Mission

Letter from Provincial

Dear Brother Oblate,

The past few weeks have been hectic but rewarding. I visited John Lee in Christchurch, and Louis McDermott and Mike Ryan in Southampton. I met with Malachy, Ray, Brian, Bert, Terry, Frank, Eugene and Paschal in Kilburn. I went on to St. Anne's, Birmingham, where I met with Frank, Leo, Ken and Noel, and the mission team involved with them in Mission to Secularity. Leo had arranged for me to meet with Fr. Pat Brown, the diocesan representative. I also met with Benny to review his arrangements for handing over the parish of Kingshurst.

I went on from there to the meeting of European Provincials in Aix. Once again, it was marvellous to meet with Oblates working in missionary situations in Ukraine, Belarus, Romania and also in the older countries of Europe. It was a privilege to visit Aix for the first time. Ned Carolan could not have been more helpful.

The Oblate charism is very much alive in all the places I visited. The new Central European Province, (comprising the old German, Austrian and Czech provinces), will be established on May 21st. This represents a big change in the Oblate profile in Europe. The Anglo-Irish province is a little isolated from the rest of Europe. Nevertheless, as numbers decline, we too will have to consider our options and what province(s) we might align with in the future. Lorcan O'Reilly is part of a task force looking at future possibilities for the Oblate mission in Europe.

After Easter, the disciples often seemed frightened and confused. They were tempted to go back to what they knew best. "To whom can we turn? What will we do now?" The readings these days look forward to the gift of the Holy Spirit who enlightens and inspires the followers of Jesus and gives them the help and strength they need to continue his mission in the world.

We are faced with major decisions over the coming three months. How can we be true to our charism? How can we make best use of our resources? What needs should we be responding to today? Difficult questions that concern all of us. Given our age profile and declining numbers it is clear that we cannot continue as we are.

Over the past six months, members of the Steering Group and the Provincial Council, together with Prospectus, have worked hard to prepare a process for moving forward. We hope that the May regional meetings will give serious consideration to the proposed Mission Statement and Core Values. These will guide decisions regarding the future



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Refounding Mission



“To evangelize requires a constant re-evaluation of our missionary practices... let us take the time needed to evaluate and discern as to whether our evangelization is in step with the reality of today’s world and with God’s specific call to us through our charism.”



direction of our province. They will become the criteria on which decisions will be taken to hand back certain parishes to dioceses and to establish new ministries.

This group has also proposed five priority areas or strategic objectives to focus our energies for the future. We recognise that it will be difficult to get agreement on these decisions. It is never easy to move on from any parish; great work is being done everywhere and there are always needs to be met. But it would be irresponsible to think that we can continue as we are. We need to plan for the future.

For this reason I have asked Ted McSherry, Tony Quinlan, Louis McDermott, Benny Halpin and Judith King to work with me in preparing a proposed list of the parishes that we need to hand back to the dioceses. I hope that this work can be completed and that we can achieve consensus on it within the Province before September 2007. That will allow us give notice to the dioceses concerned and give time to prepare the parishes for our departure by September 2008.

These decisions go to the core of our life and mission, of who we are as Oblates. They also have implications for the people we serve and are called to serve. I ask you to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us to make the right decisions and keep us united as Oblates as we move into the future together.

Yours sincerely in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate.

Willie Fitzpatrick OMI

Province Leader

Progress to date

The last issue of the Newsletter took us to that stage in the process where, based on the consultations that had taken place, the Steering Group and the Provincial Council were about to start drafting a vision statement and core values for our province.

Now, following the fourth workshop with Prospectus, we have the versions of the vision statement and core values that you will find in the next pages. These have already gone through a number of drafts and are being presented to the membership of the Province at the May regional meetings.

As you know, earlier issues of the Newsletter have all been addressed to both Oblates and our lay partners. This special issue, however, is primarily directed toward the membership of the province. It marks that point in the process where we have to endorse the work done to date. On the basis of that endorsement, the process can move into its next phases.

1. Vision Statment ('finalised draft')



We seek to grow closer to Christ and to make him known through our way of life and our ministry. Profoundly respecting the dignity and sacredness of each person, we commit ourselves principally to those whose condition cries out for help and hope.

For May Regional Meeting

Remember!

*Our Vision Statement
Should be brief, clear and
concise*

*Describe what we do and
how we do it*

*It should be inspiring and
convincing*

*It should be proactive,
action oriented*

And jargon-free!

- This vision statement attempts to describe the fundamental purpose of the Oblate Anglo-Irish province.
- It a good basis for effective planning.
- It articulates purpose for internal and external members.
- It clarifies what the province will/will not engage in.
- It is future orientated, aims to inspire and is easy to understand and communicate.

Remember!

- It is hoped that your region can endorse it as a statement of our shared vision. Based on the consultation and taking on board (as far as possible) the advice and comments received, the vision statement is the product of a number of drafts.
- Please check previous issues of the Newsletter as preparation.

Format for discussion on Vision Statement

1. Brief introduction to the Mission Statement by a member of the Steering Group or a member of the Provincial Council.
2. Quiet, reflective reading of the text
3. Reflect on the statements above in groups of 4/5, with a view to endorsing the vision statement as a basis for moving forward.
4. Share something of your findings with the full group
5. The Chairman will then seek endorsement for the statement.



Refounding Mission

2. Core Values ('finalised drafts')



"In the heart of the world the presence of the Kingdom of God becomes a reality through the Church. The Spirit of God teaches us to love this world. So how could it be an alien place for us?"



1. Community

We are effective to the extent that our compassion is collective, that we give ourselves not as a coalition of freelance ministers, but as a united missionary corps. Our community life offers grounds for hope in a world struggling to overcome disintegration, fragmentation and individualism.

The goal of our community life is to establish interdependent and profound communion among Oblates. We seek to live simply and hospitably, nourished by the sacraments, prayer, study and a vibrant Oblate tradition.

2. Availability

We commit ourselves fully to the people among whom we work, retaining a missionary flexibility to respond to the needs of the Church.

3. Compassion

We share Christ's compassion for the multitude, for the 'poor with their many faces'.

Our principal service in the Church is to proclaim by word and action Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned.

4. Dignity

We wish to look at the Church and the world from the perspective of the people with whom we work and of the poor with whom we wish to share our life. By studying and coming to understand more fully the perspective of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) and by integrating this perspective into all our ministries, we commit ourselves to work with groups and individuals already active in this field, to promote human dignity, human rights and policies to protect planet Earth.

5. Collaboration

We commit ourselves to live the Oblate charism in close collaboration with those who share our mission and with all people of goodwill.

Our goal is to build up Christian communities that are deeply rooted in the local culture and taking full responsibility for their own development.



“People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in doctrine, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission”



For May Regional Meeting

These 5 core values have been distilled from the results of the consultation and relate to our Oblate tradition as expressed in the Rule and documents from more recent General Chapters.

It is hoped that the Regions can sign off on these as our core values. Together with the Mission Statement, they will be a platform for the next stage of the process and help form the basis for future decision making in the Province.

Format for discussion on Core Values

1. Brief introduction to the Core Values by one of the members of the Steering Group or of the Provincial Council present at the meeting
2. Quiet, reflective reading of each of the five core values
3. In groups of 4/5, share your sense of each of the values, again with a view to endorsing them as a basis for moving forward.
4. Briefly share something of your findings with the whole group
5. Chairman then seeks the Region's endorsement for the core values

Note

The fact that the Regions' endorsement is being sought does not mean there is no room for suggestions to improve these statements of core values. However, we would ask that any suggested improvements, additions or deletions be well thought out and concise. It is important for the process that this endorsement stage is completed as soon as possible.



Our strengths: closeness to the people we serve; engagement with the poor; growth in certain parts of the Congregation; the wisdom of older Oblates; a growing awareness of internationality; generosity in financial sharing; and a growing number of lay associations interested in our charism



3. Strategic priority areas

As well as helping to articulate a Vision Statement and Core Values for the province, the Refounding process has helped to identify six strategic priority areas for us. This is all based on data gathered from the consultation.

1. Parish based ministries

2. Formation and retreat ministry

3. Social justice advocacy ministry

4. Outreach ministry

5. Vocations ministry

6. Accommodation and care provision for Oblates

Strategic objectives for each identified

1. Parish based ministries

- Review and evaluate in the light of our vision and values the current Oblate presence in parishes throughout the Province in order to determine where we will remain and the parishes from which we will have to withdraw.
- Reinvigorate and renew those parishes for which we will retain pastoral responsibility. Focus resources so as to enable the parish partners, Oblate and lay, to live the vision and values of the province and lead vibrant missionary parish communities.

2. Formation and retreat ministry

- Further develop Wistaston Hall as a hub to meet pastoral training and faith development needs throughout the province.

3. Social justice advocacy ministry

- Establish a social justice advocacy desk; develop links with existing justice advocacy groups; draw up priority areas for action within 12 months.

4. Outreach ministry

- Explore possibilities for Oblate outreach ministry with a view to establishing one or more such ministry(ies) within 12 – 18 months.

We are called both to be faithful and to change. To stay faithful to the mission to which we are called requires that we change.

5. Vocations ministry

- Continue to proactively and innovatively invite others to live the Oblate charism in the light of our vision and values.

6. Accommodation and care provision for Oblates

- Building on the work already done in this field, ensure that all Oblates in our province who require care are adequately and appropriately provided for.

For May Regional Meeting

- If sufficient time is available, review, discuss and comment on the choice of strategic priority areas and the strategic objectives. These are based on data coming from the consultation.

Next steps in the process

- Identify and develop key responses (outputs) necessary to implement as fully as possible each strategic objective.
- Agree a timeline (between 2007 and 2010) for achieving these strategic objectives.
- Agree targets/ milestones and measures of achievement in relation to each strategic objective.

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