



OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE, ANGLO-IRISH PROVINCE

Refounding Mission

Letter from Provincial

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Over the years as a Province, we have engaged in a process of reflection and discernment regarding our mission, what we should be doing, where we should be working, who we should be working with and how. The answers to these questions varied at different times, given the issues of the day, our own resources and the prevailing circumstances.

It was seen by many as a big step forward when John Dore took on the three Inchicore parishes in 1972. Paschal was responsible for moving into seven parishes during his time as Provincial. He had that many spare men at his disposal. Times were very different then. We had more men and our average age was much less than today. Over the past thirty years we have moved out of ministries, sometimes by choice, at other times by force of circumstance or default.

We now find ourselves at a cross roads. The situation regarding our personnel is critical. But there are other factors at work. Many believe we have lost our cutting edge as Oblates by becoming over involved in parish ministry. The world in which we minister has also changed dramatically and in many respects has become much more hostile. This has also taken its toll on us in terms of morale and energy.

But our situation is not without hope. Since Congress last year, we have been addressing these questions together. We are becoming more aware of a new spirit at work among us. The presence of our partners with us in Manchester was a powerful reminder that we are no longer on our own. Like John XXIII, what a difference it would make if we could only open the windows and be renewed by this same spirit. Many people have compared the world and church of today to that of Eugene de Mazenod's time. There are still many people untouched by the church and on the margins of society. Eugene's unique gift was his ability to reach out to these people and speak to them in a way that helped them realise they were loved by God. As Oblates, we share that same gift on behalf of the church in our day.

In the past few months we have reflected as a Province on our identity, who we are and what we stand for. We have expressed this as vision and core values. Now we are reviewing our various ministries, discerning together where to concentrate our resources in the future. We cannot do everything and we cannot be everywhere. But we believe we can make a significant contribution to the life and faith of people by a renewed commitment to the Oblate vision and charism in the Province and by refocusing our mission.

The vision statement and core values, as they appear in this newsletter, have been edited to take into account feed-back from the Regions. Do they capture the heart of who we are, what we are called to at this time? Would they attract others to come and share our charism and spirituality? Are you interested in becoming involved in any of these strategic priority areas of mission to help shape the future? Can you recommend any



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of the faithful who work with you, as persons who would have a contribution to make in one of these areas?

We need all the help we can get. And we ask the Lord to be with us in a special way over these coming months to lead and guide us as we discern together.

Yours sincerely,
Willie Fitzpatrick OMI
Provincial leader



*God loves the world;
Christ saves it; the
Holy Spirit lives in
it. 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 and alien
place for us?*

Where are we now in the process begun with ‘Prospectus’?

This edition of the RF Newsletter includes the most recent version of a vision statement and core values for our province. It incorporates as far as possible the points raised in response to the draft versions presented at the June regional meetings. Also included is the list of six strategic priority areas that have emerged from the process, together with some criteria for making strategic choices. We hope the presentation is reasonably clear, and readable (the font size has been increased as requested by some readers).

Vision statement

Profoundly respecting the dignity and sacredness of each person, we seek to grow close to Christ and make him known through our way of life and ministry. We commit ourselves principally to those on the margins of church and society.

*Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
Anglo-Irish Province*

Core values

- **Community**
- **Availability**
- **Compassion**
- **Dignity**
- **Collaboration.**

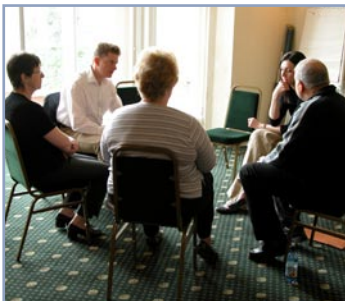
Community

We live community for mission as grounds for hope in a fragmented world. We live simply and hospitably, encouraging and respecting each other, and having a particular concern for those among us who are sick or aged.





...it is urgent that we that we honestly discern what forms religious life should take today so as precisely to be a credible sign to the world. This implies that we be open to new perspectives. This is especially true regarding the prophetic dimension of religious life, which points to the Reign of God present in the heart of the world.



Availability

We commit ourselves fully to the people with whom we work. As missionaries we seek to respond to the changing needs of those on the margins of church and society.

Compassion

We share Christ's compassion for the 'poor with their many faces'. Our principal service in the church is to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned.

Dignity

We view society and church from the perspective of those whose dignity has been dismissed or trampled upon. We work with all people of goodwill in the pursuit of justice, human dignity and care of the Earth.

Collaboration

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

STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS

1. Parishes

- a. Review and evaluate the current Oblate presence in parishes throughout the Province in the light of our vision, values and capacity, and the signs of the times, in order to determine where we will remain and the parishes from which we will have to withdraw.
- b. 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.
- c. Support the process of withdrawal from parishes we decide to hand back, recognising the sense of loss and bereavement involved.

2. Adult faith formation, Training for Ministry, Spirituality in secular world

Further develop Wistaston Hall as a centre for training and formation and explore the possibility of extending this service to other locations in the province.

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...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. Unhealthy shifts and bad habits can imperceptibly seep into our missionary practices.



3. **Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation/Advocacy**
We will develop a ministry for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Its remit will include advocacy. It will undertake an ongoing review of social justice issues in the context of all our ministries, and network with other religious congregations and NGOs.
4. **Outreach ministries**
Reinvigorate existing outreach ministries and establish new ones where there is need and where we have the capacity to do so. For example:
 - Mission to Secularity
 - Partners in Faith
 - Chaplaincies
 - Mission Development Office
 - Work with Migrants
5. **Care and support of personnel**
Because of our numbers, age profile and present commitments, there is an urgency about how we care for personnel.
We will offer support to every Oblate to develop his capacity for life and mission.
We will provide ongoing training and formation opportunities for all our personnel.
We will develop appropriate structures for volunteers and professional staff who work in partnership with us.
5. **Partners in mission**
We will invite our partners in parish and outreach ministries, young people with whom we work and men attracted to living a consecrated life to come to know and share the Oblate charism as a rich and challenging way to live the Christian life.

Guiding Questions from Congress 1987:

- To whom are we sent?
- What are we sent to do?
- What modality of presence are we to bring?
- What are the implications for formation and community life?

Also considered:

- Availability & capacity of personnel
- Financial considerations
- Balance & variety of ministries
- Vocations potential
- Oblate heritage
- State of Local Church.



Our evangelizing flows from all that we are, and what we say and do. Evangelization is as much a question of being the Good News as of speaking the Good News.



Criteria agreed at Congress 2000:

- Openness to new mission
- Option for the poor
- Community living
- Team ministry, with lay people
- Honour the Oblate international dimension
- Give scope for a missionary thrust
- Respect the energy and ability of the men
- Provide diversity in ministry

Criteria this time around - A stark choice:

Downsize

or

Make positive choice to be in parish ministry in a particular way

In what particular ways?

- A renewed commitment to Oblate charism & vision
- Priority given to people who cry out for help and hope
- Renewed commitment to Community life
- Commitment to team ministry and partnership
- Continual needs-assessment and development of outreach works

Where can we minister like that?

Most of our parishes would allow us/ have allowed us to work like that, but we still have to make positive choices to concentrate our resources in certain parishes, which will mean handing back others.

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