

Post Congress RESPONSES FROM DELEGATES

EDINBURGH MISSION:

- ❖ At a Parish Team Meeting all six Delegates agreed to speak at a Mass (two at each of the three Masses 27th/28th June). The feedback was positive –interesting but no enquiries received or further information requested. Some of us also spoke at the CMS Planned Talk. [AM]
- ❖ The Congress most certainly made an impact on me and I now want to know where my mission is going – what my contribution should be instead of expecting things from others. I am looking for new openings – something different - and looking at things from a family point of view. What do they need? How can we make people feel more comfortable? [KW]
- ❖ We all had the opportunity to speak at Mass to give a brief resume on our experience. We covered a couple of topics each, I spoke on the Oblate Youth, outlining what great work they are doing and how enthusiastic they were in their presentation and talking about their experiences, I also spoke of the workshop on "Sharing the Oblate Spirit" Eugene De Mazenod's journey, his hopes and dreams, the work he did. I also spoke about the talk from the Brazilian Priests and how it made a lot of us feel that we were very privileged to be able to have Mass every weekend and in some cases everyday as these communities were lucky to get Mass once a month! [KB]
- ❖ **I found the Congress to have been very rewarding. It was good to see how the Oblates have worked through how to move towards a future that meets the needs of the Oblates and serves well the wider community. Feedback was given at all masses and the Parish Council are considering how to apply the objectives of the Congress at local level.**
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KILBURN CENTRE OF MISSION

- ❖ **On a personal note, the things that made a mark for me were: 1]The easy fellowship and peaceability that obtained there. 2] The openness of the dialogue. 3] (Top of the lot) Willie's address- its courage, compassion and purpose made it very special. [JT]**

BIRMINGHAM:

- ❖ **I had feedback from people who attend St. Annes as well as St. Michaels. The general consensus is that the Oblates from the Mission team are missed in both parishes. They were an energizing and dynamic presence in Birmingham. St. Michaels church is open in the afternoon thanks to the commitment and dedication of the volunteers and continuing support of the diocese and parish priest. The volunteers are adamant that what was started initially with Oblate patronage should continue and that something of the Oblate spirit remains. I call it the Oblate footprint. There is an interest in maintaining the Oblate connection so keep sending me info about the retreats and any other events or communications; they are displayed on the notice boards in St. Michaels. Sr. Mary Joseph and Helen Moore both said that being at the Congress gave them support and a good boost to come home with to continue their work. Meeting with others from Oblate parishes was a valuable opportunity to share experiences. Their great wish is that the Oblate spirit remains; that The Seeker Centre, as an Oblate foundation , will continue.**

ROCK FERRY:

- ❖ We haven't met post-congress as a team that went there together, although the parish project has continued on its course. However, it wouldn't surprise me if your e-mail serves as a reminder for us to all meet together. [AB]
- ❖ I felt very privileged to be asked to be part of the Congress planning team. The invitation confirmed the reality and responsibility of being a Partner in Mission. For me it anticipated what we were to hear over and over again at the Congress that each Baptised person is called and

empowered by the Sacrament of Baptism to participate fully in Christ's (and St.Eugene's)mission in our times. The idea to involve lay partners was listed as a recommendation from Congress ' 06.It is good to realise that the Leadership team took note of the evaluations from last time. I also think it was a courageous decision - a bit like lifting the lid on Pandora's box.It was not only a joy but great fun to share the journey to the Congress with the countless people who gave their time and talents so generously and who all contributed in unique ways to the finished product we enjoyed in Manchester. I particularly want to thank Frank,Joanne, Judith,Leo,Moyra, and Ray for their friendship and encouragement to me.Also to Sheila O Dea and Alison Benson who contributed so much to the liturgy preparation. And what of the Congress.My outstanding recollection is of a group of people who together are church,who like working and being together,who are generous,willing and gifted ,encouraging each other to be the best it is possible to be.My hope is that that ideal becomes a reality in all our parishes, and that in Manchester each person began to dream of what is possible for their parish in liturgy,in mission and in partnership. Of course, there was and is sadness at the Oblate withdrawal from parishes(including my own) and the Ryan report with its implications for clergy and those affected by the abuse. But the joys of friendships renewed,the sharing of prayer,the companionship of meals,lively conversations (at all times of the day and night!!) gave great witness to us being a welcoming community of believers - Oblates and partners missioning together. [MT]

LEEDS/SICKLING HALL:

- ❖ The situation in Sicklinghall is as I am sure you will appreciate a little different to the other Parishes where the Oblate withdrawal is about to happen. Sicklinghall today is simply a rural part of the main Parish of Wetherby . Formerly as you will no doubt recall Sicklinghall was the centre of the Parish, as well as an important and lively centre for the Oblates. When the Oblates left Wetherby the original reason for the retention of a Priest "in retirement" at Sicklinghall was to act as Chaplain to the Convent of the Holy Family Sisters of Bordeaux . This arrangement I believe has not only fulfilled the original vision of the departing OMI's but has assisted the Parish and Deanery (and of course our village community Catholic and non Catholic alike) . Needless to say the Holy Family Sisters (mainly now in retirement) also value highly the OMI input to their daily spiritual life. Sicklinghall is also different in that the Church and its grounds and a small apartment are vested in a separate Charity set up in 1854 by the original Catholic benefactor viz Peter Middleton. Additionally we have the benefit of a separate Trust fund dating back to the sale of the redundant parts of the original property in the 1980's .These monies allow us to provide for the needs of the resident priest as well as the maintenance of the Church Buildings and grounds. In the middle of the 19th century a separate agreement was made between the OMI's and the Middletons that the OMI's would provide priests to support the original concept of the Catholic needs of Sicklinghall. This undertaking has been continuously and faithfully fulfilled by the OMI's . You are also correct to note that even in this unusual set of circumstances that tensions can arise with the arrival of different(diocesean) leadership. However with goodwill on all sides they are resolved and each recognises the benefits of having "each other". Immediately after the Congress in Manchester and filled with the enthusiasm it generated in both Val and I we wrote to The Provincial regretting the departure of the OMI Charism from the major cities in the Northern part of England. Remarking that their remains much need for your "approach" particularly in the large conurbations ,many of which contain significantly deprived communities. Father Fitzpatrick in his reply seemed to share these concerns, but he pointed out that much as we all appreciate the need our prayers are required for the young people with the courage and generosity to answer His call, to enable action to follow. [KR]

INCHICORE/BLUEBELL:

- ❖ I was very inspired and privileged to be attending the congress. We did meet a while back down in the Oblates, but a lot could'nt make it as it was holiday time. But for the people that came it was enriching. We do hope to bring it to the wider community but our ppc is not back until 3rd

September. I am as a member of God's community delighted for all the hard work the clergy do for us. thank you all for the enriching work you all do. [EB]

ANGLESEY CENTRE OF MISSION:

- ❖ I was very moved by my first attendance at conference and I felt as though I had received a spiritual injection by my presence. I was able to share this with my community at Mass the following weekend. I was moved by the spirit of hospitality and generosity which seemed to pervade the whole event. I found the large Mass very significant with Eucharistic Ministers distributing the Eucharist to priests. I was particularly moved by the men from Brazil and the listener's summing up at the end of the Congress. The inviting back of the ex-Oblates I found very significant and it was interesting that they are engaged in work of a social nature. At the moment, here on Anglesey, we are going through a very difficult patch, and are in my opinion getting bogged down in trivia instead of focusing on the vision. It is good, therefore, to have the bigger picture from the Congress as this can be supportive in difficult and frustrating times. [JM]
- ❖ I really found my experience at the conference very moving and valuable to me in my work as part of the Anglesey Mission, even though I am not one of the Mission leaders. The groups where we shared our experiences gave me a good insight into how the Oblates work in other areas and how the Oblate charism effects everyone's work even those who are no longer under the care of the Oblates. These I found more useful than the input sessions themselves. I found the liturgies moving and the time spent with other mission groups supportive and encouraging. It also bonded us as a Mission Group although we have a long way to go yet. We have had feedback from people who were at the Congress and they were very moving and motivating but I still feel that we could go further in using the impetus from the congress to include all the laity on our area in moving the Centre of Mission forward. Inclusivity is the key I feel for the future of our Mission Centre. I would like to thank all those involved in organizing the conference. It had a lovely family atmosphere and it reinforced my personal view that the Oblates always have time for people, a rare gift in our modern world. I look forward to the next one. [CH]
- ❖ **Each of the Delegates from "The Anglesey Centre of Mission" expressed gratitude and spoke of an uplifting experience and an awakening of what have been the norm and what may happen in the future. "The way forward", "The Shared Responsibility" and the strong theme of "Partners in Mission" is both challenging and frightening; however, it is apparent that the laity has to be involved in taking responsibility within their own communities. The genuine concern expressed by the laity of the Parishes and communities throughout the Anglo-Irish Oblate Missionary of those who have or will be experiencing the departure of the OMI clergy is unsettling for them. May they have the strength to carry them through these challenging times, Prayers and good wishes are with them. It is therefore imperative that the structures put in place by our own Centre of Mission will be of such that Anglesey will aim to be a Proclaiming, Welcoming and Missionary Community able to serve the needs and requirements of all within our communities. Feedback from the Congress was presented to the laity during the Masses held in all the Churches the weekend after the Congress which was gratefully received by all. A power point presentation is to be given out at each of the Churches on the Island the weekend of the 5th/6th September 2009 which will include a resume of the Congress as well as an overview of the aims of the Centre of Mission on Anglesey. I was honoured, grateful and felt very humble to be part of was a very informative and uplifting experience. Thank you. [SS]**
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- ❖ I am not sure that my comments will be of much use to you particularly as we no longer have Oblates in Jersey but I suppose our experience could be useful to those parishes that have or are just losing their Oblate presence. However, it may not be what they want to hear. My overall impression of the Congress was good and I found parallels with what the Oblate vision of the future is and what the Portsmouth Diocese are working towards. Your Centres of Mission bringing together parishes are what we are calling Pastoral Areas and your Shared leadership is the same as our Collaborative Ministry. In my experience here I would say that both things take a long time to get fully accepted and then only if the Pastoral Coordinator, the leader of the Pastoral Area in our case, is fully committed to the vision. Then I am sure this doesn't come as any surprise to you. It was heart warming to hear that the parishes who have lost or are going to lose their Oblate presence say that they would keep the Oblate Charism alive. We in Jersey felt the same but fourteen years down the line it has been diluted into non existence. I don't understand why but Diocesan priests seem a completely different breed to the Religious Orders and what we have now is a totally different feeling (not a good word for what I am trying to say but I can't come up with anything better right now). I hope for their sakes, the parishes that is, I am wrong and they succeed where we failed but I fear years down the line they will eventually realise that the special Oblate Charism has gone. One thing that really impressed me about the Congress was the invitations to the seminarians and priests who had left the Order and how grateful they were to be invited. I think including them was something very special. I came back full of intentions to do more to raise the profile of the Oblates in Jersey with our annual Pilgrimage Group to Lourdes this September as I felt I had really been very lax in providing information about the Oblates while spending so much time promoting the September trip itself. [DG]
- ❖ **We have not met as a group since the Congress in Manchester. Tomorrow we are having a meeting about Lourdes Pilgrimage on 17th Sept. and maybe will get to talk to Irene, Geraldine etc. On a personal note I can only say it was one of the best experiences in my life. I grew up beside the Oblates in Inchicore and always knew about Eugene DeMazenod and his life etc. I have been involved with the Oblates since I was about 12 years of age helping out in MAMI. When I went to the Spirit of Eugene workshop in Manchester it was the first time I felt I had an insight into what he was trying to do when he founded the congregation. I cannot explain how I felt but I just wanted to know more about him and get out and tell people about him. I am hoping I can make a trip to Aix next year PG and be imbued with his spirit. The experience made me think of what evangelising is really all about. I would love to have a follow up and just wish I did live in an OMI parish. However I do feel privileged to be involved in MAMI and look forward to our pilgrimage on 17th Sept. [KC]**

OBLATE YOUTH SERVICE:

- ❖ Thanks and congrats to you and all the planning team on a great congress ! It was a pleasure to attend and participate, and a very promising follow on from Manchester. The most poignant moment for me, was the Provincials address of the Ryan report. It was extremely brave, and I felt that Fr Willie's emotional response and honesty, was a credit to him as an individual but also as the Provincial. It was what needed to be said for a very long time. Prior to the Congress this was an issue that bothered me greatly, and although nothing we can say can make up for the past, Willie did give us all hope for the future. From an OYS perspective it was an honour to be asked to present a work shop, and we are delighted that it was well received. It's great for the group to see that the work they do is noticed and more importantly supported by the wider Oblate family. But, it was also great for us to see the work that is done by the many other groups, parishes and Oblates throughout the province and Missions. From chatting to our gang after, it really inspired us to continue our work and to make more connections, which will allow us to learn more about the "bigger picture" of the Oblate family. The talk the two lads gave about Brazil really was inspiring, and it certainly put's our own challenges into perspective. I mean that in a positive light, as in, our challenges and goals (as a youth service & Province) seem that much

more attainable! I always feel that the Oblates need to get more of the "good news" out there ! The congress for many of the delegates is the first time they hear that so much is going on throughout the Oblate world, and that so many individual Oblates are doing so, so much in the most difficult of conditions. The response was the same when Frank Santuuci came to Dublin to give his presentation to the OYS, we were all amazed. But I and others couldn't help feeling "I've been involved in with the Oblates for so long... Why am I only hearing this stuff now !" I know of late there is an effort to do this, Frank travelled throughout the Province. But I think that more needs to be done, to both raise the profile of the Oblates and to inspire people at home to do more and get involved. I made a point to Judith mid Congress, that I felt we were doing a lot of talking and that I hoped that we would be doing something more concrete. That we'd actually leave with some sort of plan to move forward. After a bit of reflection it dawned on me, we have come on so far. Manchester was the first time that the lay partners were invited to a congress, and the concept of "partners" was really put forward. Now here we were, workshops being held and presented by Oblates and ourselves the lay partners side by side. The feeling of ownership and partnership was evident for all to see, which was fantastic. It felt like we're all in this together and that mind set is a huge move forward in a short enough space of time. (So if your sharing this with Judith, and this was your plan, well done, i'm a bit slow :) but I got it in the end). On a practical point, we followed up on an invitation from the Darndale New Life Centre, and quite a number of OYS members participated in a youth summer camp throughout July. We did receive plenty of invitations at the congress, and do hope to follow up on as many as possible but Lourdes does come around very quickly. So, as you can imagine we're a little busy at the moment..... Only a little over two weeks to go now :)

NORRIS GREEN:

- ❖ I congratulate you on the organisation of that wonderful event in Manchester. It was a fantastic experience and I continue to marvel at the superb organisation. It was perfection to the Nth degree. Sadly I have to report that there has not yet been any organised follow- up far as I know. Immediately afterwards I suggested that we should meet up with those within reach who had been present. I actually suggested Rock Ferry and even Colwyn Bay. I felt it important to give everyone the opportunity to reflect on the experience and also essential "to keep the pot boiling" while it was fresh in everyone's minds. However the suggestion was not accepted. We did feed back to the parish at our usual monthly meeting and I tried to emphasise that Eugene King was reiterating what we have been trying to work at, since the news that the Oblates are leaving, viz. Building up the Body of Christ, Liturgy, Recognising one's gifts etc. etc....No meetings have been taking place since the holiday period but we start again in Sept. and hope to have something more positive to feed back. [TF]

FORMER OBLATES

- ❖ Few thoughts on Manchester Congress: It was a most enjoyable and enriching experience. After 14 years away from Oblate life, I went with some trepidation but with an open heart. The welcome was mind-blowing and the ease in reconnecting was indicative of a deep bond which I now believe no time, no distance or no change can alter. I felt very Oblate and very grateful for all I've received over the years of formation and ministry. It still plays a huge role in my life. For me everything about the organisation of the congress was excellent. A great sense of unity ran through the congress – Oblate, lay, youth etc. The word "courage" seemed to best sum up the spirit of the three days. I reconnected with an Anglo-Irish Province infused with courage; humble courage in face of the pain following the Ryan report, and faithfilled quiet courage in face of the challenges of the future. I felt encouraged to play some part or make some contribution in that Oblate future. Those days in Manchester were special, a reminder of my Oblateness and that strong, abiding sense of brotherhood which outlasts time and change. It was very renewing!! [ML]
- ❖ With regard to the Congress, I don't have any well developed thoughts on the subject. It's more of a process of reconciliation and growth as far as I'm concerned and it was great to be invited and be a part of it. Some of it is about the Oblates being a congregation which witnesses to a new way of doing things by including a group of people the official Church has long discarded. It's

a step on a long road to change at one level. On a more practical day to day level - what could we offer each other? Well, I think that perhaps some ex-oblates (myself included) would like to give something back and contribute to the growth of the congregation by offering our services as part of any committees which we might be able to contribute something to. We have an appreciation for and some understanding of Oblate spirituality and History. Perhaps we could be part of some of the committees which debate and inform the wider Oblate Congregation on such issues as Justice and Peace, Integrity of Creation etc. I am aware that some ex-Oblates have specific skills and knowledge around child care issues and may be able to help in the on-going struggle to repair the harm done in this area as well as providing a best practice model for on-going development around the well publicised issues of recent years. At the level of initial and on-going formation perhaps we could participate and exchange experiences and reflections on what it means to try to live a Christian ideal in the modern world. Fraternal support, encouragement for each of our states in life could be enhanced through increased contact too. Practical planning for an uncertain future for religious congregations is perhaps another area we might be able to lend professional help. Finally, maybe some form of skills / expertise audit could be attempted to identify just what is on offer from the ex-oblate group. All this of course is a two-way learning process and it's as much as to our benefit to have this renewed contact and not simply a case of what we can offer the oblats. Our spirituality and day to day concerns of family, work and faith is something which can be enhanced through increased contact. And Finally, finally! Networking is no harm to anyone - issues arise suddenly and it's good to have a network of people we can turn to address individual, specific and emerging concerns. It provides an opportunity to plan for the future and not merely react to events. [C.L.]

- ❖ What I found truly worthwhile was the fact that so many lay persons gave 3 days of their time to exploring the Oblate charism and mission. And, I suppose what we all find painful - and, I mean all - is the reality of diminishing numbers of Oblates in the Province and the consequential handing back of parishes to the dioceses. But no point in being gloomy: we have to see how we can address this unfolding reality. I am truly impressed by the commitment of so many people who are directly involved in Oblate parishes or former Oblate parishes. The particular difficulty that I have is that I do not live in an Oblate parish or near one. So the extent to which I believe that I can get directly involved is somewhat circumscribed. On a very practical level I believe that I could assist in some fund-raising ventures. [NB]
- ❖ Many thanks for this and for all your hard work during the Congress. It might be more productive to have a dialogue over lunch about what might be the most effective collaboration [post-congress] because I confess that I haven't yet had a chance to think this through, but my preliminary thoughts are that it would be good to focus on: **communicating** effectively what the Province and Congregation is doing (i.e. a kind of alumni bulletin) and perhaps even creating an association of former Oblates not just in Britain and Ireland but one that encompasses other provinces too; Developing the **Oblate spirituality** e.g. by holding an annual retreat either residential or over a day or putting on an event for spouses e.g. the enneagram so that wives could share in the lay apostolate. Monthly prayer intentions would also be great; Asking former Oblates what their **jobs and skills** are so that there is a database that the Province could use in its work i.e. how many are currently involved in social work, education etc. That would allow Willie and the Council to draw on advice and expertise in areas relevant to the Province's work. I know these are sketchy but this will be a process and the key to it is starting a structured conversation. Why not invite a few people to meet with Willie and some Oblates to take it forward? If you wanted to do it in London I'd be happy to host any meetings here. [DR]

COLWYN BAY:

- ❖ As a group we were delighted to attend the Congress and it provided us with many thought provoking ideas. It also made us think "where do we go from here". On our return to Colwyn Bay we met as a group to try and co-ordinate our thoughts and ideas. As soon as Fr. declan returned from his holiday we met as a formal group and have a regular programme mapped out with particular reference to:-
 - a baptismal formation group

- Confirmation group
- Enquiry programme for converts
- A day of prayer and reflection for Eucharistic ministers

We have a programme of regular meetings with Fr. Declan and are looking forward with enthusiasm to a parish meeting early next year. The congress gave us much food for thought and Fr. Declan is giving us guidance and help and leading us towards a programme including 'stewardship': are we to become a 'centre of mission' and how do we fulfill our baptismal promises etc. We look forward to moving on and give our thanks to the help we gained from the congress. [CK]