

Oblate Congress 2009: Impressions from a first-timer

As this was an Oblate Congress it almost goes without saying that we were warmly welcomed, well-fed and worked hard. There were 202 delegates: laity and Oblates from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Brazil, Canada, Sri Lanka, India and Africa. In tune with the theme 'Refounding Mission' ex-Oblates had been invited to the Congress.

Our first liturgy centred on reminding us of our Baptism and, as we learnt all good liturgies should be, it involved many of our senses as we signed ourselves with water from the central fountain. The theme was then set by Fr Eugene King who told us that we needed to have 3 conversations: with St Eugene De Mazenod, with Pope John XXIII and with St Paul. These conversations would help us to Refound Mission (for the Oblates, our own parishes and in our own lives), to reclaim the world as God's Creation and to find out: Who we are as Christians and What do we have to give to the world...An easy task then!!

Through workshops and small group sessions these conversations were opened up for us. But, as we could only attend two workshops out of six presented we relied on other delegates to inform us of the issues explored in the workshop we had not attended. A film was taken of all the meetings and workshops and we are promised both a booklet from the congress and a short film in due course.

What came over strongly to me was that: We each have to accept the responsibility of our Baptism (that God spoke to me and said 'You are my beloved son/daughter in whom I am well pleased'..WOW; We must learn ways of Breaking the Word to find God's real presence in our lives; Justice and Peace and Integrity of God's Creation is all important: We must recognise that we are all leaders and gifted in various ways: and that the central gifts are to listen, to inspire, to believe, to collaborate and to partner.

The strategic priorities for the Oblates were identified as Centres of Mission, Adult Faith Formation, Justice and Peace and Integrity of God's Creation, Partners in Mission and Mission Outreach.

Where does this leave the parish of St Anne's? Our group had about ten minutes to discuss this at the end of Congress and bearing in mind the themes of Congress we discussed: The mission begins within: Be parish in a different way: A framework for the community: Formalise a link with the Oblates (perhaps support a particular mission?): Encourage and Empower through Adult Formation: To remember the pain of the Catholic Church not just the Oblates.

As a layperson I was extremely moved by the emotions of the Oblates as they touched on the Ryan Report, the withdrawal from parishes where they had served for many years and I was equally impressed by the ex-Oblates who were delighted to be remembered and to be 'allowed' to continue to offer their gifts in service of our God This is a responsibility we all share. We all have gifts and everyone's gift is needed for the building up of God's Kingdom.

If you are still reading I thank you for your perseverance and pray for you.

Pat Hughes