

Post Congress RESPONSES FROM OBLATES

Brian de Burca

What was your experience of the Congress ?

In general: very enjoyable, and positive. The preparation leading to the Congress was good. If the aim was Sharing together: the Journey, the Hope, then I feel the aim was achieved. I liked the “banner” and reflection by Carmel Murtagh and thought it could have been integrated more into our days together.

I attended/remember the following:

- Tom McGrath’s “timeout” on scripture. I received a lot from it and thought it was excellent.
- Both Gene King’s and Sheila O’Dea’s workshops. Both interesting but I am not sure if I learned/ gained from them
- Pat Mc Grath and Mick Brady’s contribution. Liked both, gained more (for me) from Pat and also liked a lot the Brazil presence.
- Gene Kings opening talk. I enjoyed it
- Listener Feedback did not do an awful lot for me – but I am sure her contribution was well received by others
- Judith’s role and presence I found valuable

For me the most important formative aspect of the congress was not in the talks/ workshops **but in the way it was run and in the living experience of the congress.** I am always conscious of what the U.S. Bishops said on adult faith formation “while the parish may have an adult formation programme, it is no less true that the parish is an adult faith formation programme.” (Our Hearts were burning within us §121§)

- This was a congress organised by lay and OMI together- the Sign We Give. This was collaborative work in action
- We were informed and well prepared about the Congress beforehand
- At the Congress: the way we sat at tables – mixed in every way. The idea was certainly good but I am not too sure if we were together long enough to gain much from it.
- The **symbols** spoke very loudly—candle at start, water, candles at end and sharing the light, liturgies and how they were done. Most important too symbols of the **Church as people of God** by
 - a] baptism highlighted, lived as the fundamental sacrament
 - b] when we celebrated the Eucharist together. We were all gathered standing around a table, priests and laity all mixed in together as one family and one Oblate in vestments presiding. Communion was distributed by him and 5 lay people. What a wonderful vision of the people of God.
 - c] When our new Leadership Team was being installed by the Vicar General of the Oblates we prayed for the gift of the Holy Spirit on our Leadership Team all 200 delegates were invited to extend their hands in prayer over the Team. It was a wonderful feeling of the Church praying together. I was at a confirmation around the same time where Bishop and 4 priests alone extended their hands over confirmandi and they alone were ministers of the eucharist. I contrasted both experiences of Church.
 - d] **And** to see Judith included in that blessing spoke too.
- The presence of ex-omi’s and their words at the end touched me. Their presence was not something I looked forward to (some yes, some no). I thought their words on our final day were very good and I was touched. I did wonder on what basis/ criteria some were invited and some not. Paddy Coady I think would have been happy to have been there. Maurice O’Connell, Jim McMahon have turned up in Corpus Christi (Paddy Nolan’s funeral/ OMI farewell mass). I know Tony Bissett went to see Fr Steckling in Inchicore – their OMI connections not entirely lost.
- Also wondered a little about parish delegates and how they are or should be picked. I have no solution! Is going to congress a reward for work, an invitation for growth? Should we have continuity in delegates from past meetings, congresses or new faces?

- Not too sure what the value for Norris Green Delegates was. Those who were there reported back at a subsequent meeting here, but I think nothing further happened from it. I think all enjoyed the experience.
- I have already written to organising committee and to Willie to say thanks for well organised event.

Tony Quinlan, Edinburgh

At the St. John Ogilvie June PPC I shared what was significant for me from the June 2009 Congress. **The highlight was the input from Michael Brady and Pat McGrath who shared without notes or IT**, in their contribution it was obvious the mission was at the heart of their life. They spoke from the heart. They knew their mission and could describe it for others.

The Congress was another step in "Refounding Mission", it was pleasant and good to renew friendships, however there is still work to be done in addressing the core issues in respect of "Centres of Mission". Speaking with Lay and Oblates outside of the formal gatherings I got the message that little progress has been made in the Centres.

While we own the six principles for Oblate Mission there is another step necessary if we are to move forward. We need a method for Oblates to identify the major areas of their apostolate and define criteria for successful job performance. It is not enough to announce vision and values, in pastoral care we need to be more concrete. People with whom we share our ministry will engage better if there is a pastoral plan.

At the launch of "Centres of Mission" we were invited to decide and describe the apostolate for ourselves; I feel this was a mistake. On the positive side I suggest the hallmark of a successful entity is:

- A leader who can describe and define his task more accurately than anyone else.
- An effective way to define a job is to describe precisely the tasks that he performs.
- All tasks, in order to be performed correctly, demand certain knowledge, skills, resources and behaviours.

It is important that we move on from "in being" and "hit and miss" to bring clarity for ourselves and the people who share our mission. Able people will not hang about unless there is a plan to which they can relate.

John McFadden, Edinburgh

During one of the small group session I was very struck when an Oblate said, "this is no longer about us anymore." There seemed to be a real sense of liberation in this and probably identified where much of the energy for the Congress was coming from.

Another Oblate said to me that he felt like a "guest at his own Congress." In response, I felt very affirmed in my vocation, thinking, we must have something special if all these people want a part of it. However, I would not regard the Oblates as Congress Delegates - Oblates are there by virtue of their commitment to the Congregation as opposed to being delegated.

Finally, and most significantly, I was very struck by Eugene King's closing remarks when he said, " what I didn't hear were the words Ordained Ministry." Eugene simply left it there and did not qualify whether the absence of reference to Ordained Ministry was a good or a bad thing. Subsequently, I sought clarification and was assured that such a absence was not a good thing. Moreover, the apparent absence of reference to Oblate religious life and priesthood was something which Eugene felt would have serious implications for the future of the Province and Refounding Mission.

From a *practical* point of view I not too keen on this hotel for a venue for many reasons.

Lorcan O'Reilly, Partners in Mission

A few comments on the Congress Event. First of all I feel that the group entrusted to the task of the Congress did an excellent job in organising the event and I congratulate them on the many hours of work that was put into making it all flow so well.

It was a good gathering and the atmosphere was excellent. The inputs and workshops were very well done. It was a nourishing event for many of the people who participated in it. However I would also have a caution that we should not read too much into the event itself. It was good for a few days and there was a good sharing but there are no clear outcomes and we should not plan for the future based on the 'feel good factor' of the event.

Standing back from it though there are a number of issues around it.

1.) As I look back from the point of the view of the Council there was a **lack of clarity** of what we wanted from the event. This was reflected in the evolution of the establishment of the team. Initially the task was divided into two. Your group was initially only asked to deal with the planning and logistics matters and others were to set the content and process. However in the end the logistics group were left to carry the whole event. This contrasts sharply with previous Congress preparations which were entrusted to a distinct planning group which had a degree of the independence. I would say the Council did not seem willing to let go of the event while at the same time did not have the time to give it the attention and reflection it deserved.

2) There was also a lack of engagement with the membership of the Province prior to the event. Prior to other Congress gatherings Regional meetings and for Congress 2006 meetings with laity and OMI took place prior to the event. So in many ways it was a stand alone event.

3) The introduction of the Congress as a 3 year event was to be matched by the enhancement of the November meetings. This has not fully materialised in the way the previous planning group had suggested.

4) Previous Congress were direction setting events. **This one was not.** Maybe we have not yet reached a point where we can actually take direction from a process involving those we share ministry/mission with in a true sense of partnership. Instead the event was 'safe' in that we shared common experiences together of workshops and inputs.

5) Conversational evidence points to a number of Oblates feeling somewhat disconnected by the event in terms of an affirmation for Oblate vocational and religious life. An omission referred to in Gene Kling's remarks.

6) The liturgies were well thought out and meaningful. Though provision for a Eucharist on Monday morning would have been helpful given the large number that had arrived on the Sunday night.

In summary I would say it was a very good gathering of Oblates and members of the Oblate Family but as a Congress event there was a significant number of weaknesses.

Kevin McLaughlin, JPIC

Congress has not exactly been at the forefront of my thoughts recently. I don't actually have a mission or a community to feedback to since I'm studying. I hope the JPIC team will follow through on its offer to provide 'Be the Change', though I'm not a part of that particular enterprise. The Congress was timely, apt, energising, relevant and a positive experience. I remember that well. I hope we have the courage to do what we said we want to do - I'm slightly anxious about this. Business as usual and all that. Anyway, that's my tuppence.