



OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE, ANGLO-IRISH PROVINCE

Refounding Mission

Letter from Provincial

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

A sincere word of thanks to all of you who took part in the recent round of consultations. Edel and Diarmuid (Prospectus) met with 132 of us over the course of seven meetings. They were impressed with the overall level of interest in the process, the response and the positive and open approach of the participants. Personally, I was surprised that they picked up so quickly where we are at and what we need to do.

The bible has two words for time: *chronos* meaning time in the sense of minutes, hours etc, and *kairos*, which has a deeper meaning. The latter is used in relation to Mary: "In the fullness of time". It suggests providence, a right time for everything. This is God's time. Many have suggested that now may be a *kairos* moment for our Province, a time chosen by God, calling for our response in faith.

Our Superior General, Fr. Steckling speaks of two calls to which we must respond today: to be faithful and to change. It is good to reflect on what it is that we need to be faithful to, the values we wish to take with us into the future. We must also decide what we need to change so as to better respond to the needs of today.

In this issue:

<i>Consultation completed</i>	2
<i>Key message from consultation</i>	2
<i>Positioning the Province</i>	3
<i>What's working well</i>	
<i>What needs improving</i>	
<i>Emerging themes</i>	
<i>Critical factors to refounding</i>	4
<i>Factors critical to selecting new opportunities</i>	
<i>Potential focus areas</i>	5
<i>Lay formation/leadership</i>	
<i>Outreach ministries</i>	
<i>Youth ministry options</i>	6
<i>Implications of selecting focussed ministries</i>	
<i>Suggested selection criteria</i>	7
<i>Developing a Vision Statement</i>	
<i>The next steps</i>	8

Our question is not unlike that of Alice in Wonderland:

Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

Alice: I don't much care where.

Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.

Unlike Alice, our charism and values are the road map guiding us into the future.

Rolheiser described the essence of Oblate spirituality and charism as:

- People of prayer, relating to Christ as beloved disciples, not through role or status.
- At the service of those who are biblically poor. Who are those on the cross? Who are the excluded? Who falls through the cracks of our culture? Wherever the cross is in our world, there we will be.
- We are missionaries. "A missionary is someone who goes where he or she is needed but not wanted; and leaves when he or she is wanted but not needed." (Fr. Zago)
- We live and work in community
- We look to Mary our Mother and Patron, following the example of the poor who who have always turned to her in their need.
- Simplicity and earthiness, being close to the people.

We can't do everything, but whatever we do we can do well. This can be our gift to the church and the world. We are not on our own! We ask the Lord, Mary and St. Eugene who have gone before us, to be with us as we move forward together into the next phase of this process of discernment.

Yours sincerely in Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate.

Willie Fitzpatrick OMI

Refounding Mission



*Let us remember three things:
God loves us
We must move forward
God is with us*

“We can’t do everything, but whatever we do we can do well. This can be our gift to the church and the world. We are not on our own!”



Progress to date: Consultation completed

Region	Oblates	Lay	Total
Dublin	23	7	30
Dublin Parishes	7	8	15
Anglesey	9	15	24
Birmingham	7	8	15
Merseyside	6	7	13
London & South	9	14	23
Edinburgh	3	9	12
Total	64	68	132

Where are we now in the Timetable?

An extensive communications and consultation process has taken place, involving 132 people. The refounding project has been set up, data has been gathered and analysed. The planned second workshop with the Steering Group, the Provincial Council and Prospectus took place in Dublin on 27 February 2007. We are now at Step 3 in the process, the point at which we have to develop a Vision Statement in the context of the data gathered.

Steps still to come

- Step 4 Where we agree on our strategic objectives.
- Step 5 Putting together an Action Plan with guidelines for implementation and evaluation.
- Step 6 The point at which we finalise strategy and circulate it for comments.

Purpose of Consultation Process

- to understand the views of Oblates and lay partners on the province today, including strengths and weaknesses.
- to identify future opportunities for the province
- to name the challenges likely to prevent us attaining these opportunities, and possible ways to overcome these challenges
- to identify key choices for the province, and the implications of these

Key Message from Consultation Process

- The consultation was extremely encouraging and offers hope for future. People welcomed the opportunity to take part. There was good energy for the process.
- The clear expectation is that the communication and dialogue will continue.

Refounding Mission



*people need more clarity
as to what exactly they
are being invited into*



...set up clear structures to empower lay Christians and help them fulfil their vocation...

- While there were some localised differences, the level of agreement on what participants would like to see the Oblates doing in the future was high.
- Some lay participants, in particular, were uneasy about the implications for their places, the possible departure of the Oblates.
- Most were realistic and eager to get involved and to help.
- A general acceptance that change is necessary and a new structure has to be put in place. But people need more clarity as to what exactly they are being invited into.
- The seeds for refounding are there, but a recurring message was: help us to get involved; provide us with opportunities to acquire the skills/formation for partnership.

The positioning of the Province today

Faithful to charism

It is not clear that we are being true to the Founder's charism (build, grow and move on) today. We are slow to respond to changing needs. We need to return to the heart of the charism and rediscover our identity. The current focus is too general: sacramentalising more than evangelising. Common purpose, direction and leadership are weak; too many individual efforts.

Parish ministry

1. There is an ambivalence about our presence in parishes: some love this work; others see it as a 'comfort zone' from which we should move. By 2010, the number of Oblates in full-time active ministry will be 44. Are we merely maintaining parishes for bishops?
2. Through parish contact, we have strong relationships with people. There is scope for team-based ministries and the integration of parish and mission. Parish is a good base from which to reach out to the abandoned and disaffected. Parishes provide the resources for outreach ministries. Many of our parishes are synonymous with the Oblates and are strong on community and spirituality. There is room to develop a missionary spirit in parishes, to learn from good practice.

Role of laity

The Church belongs to all the baptised. The task is to create environments where lay people want to engage more fully with their Christian vocation. It is necessary to set up clear structures to empower lay Christians and help them fulfil their vocation to bring the Gospel to others as partners.

Partnership

Has to include real responsibility, working together as a team, acknowledging the different gifts. Respect, trust, faith and common purpose are central. Need to be clear about what we are inviting lay people into - roles, responsibilities, structures of participation etc, and what is meant by 'partners in mission'. We will have to give more attention to links with other clergy, religious and the other Christian churches.

Refounding Mission



The Oblate charism is still vague and poorly communicated

Responsibilities for charism and evangelisation belong to all of us.

Formation of the laity is key to developing partnership for mission

What is working well?

- Power of the charism; a strong spirituality that includes sincere searching and keeps Oblates close to the communities where they work.
- Oblate pilgrimages and a variety of individual efforts are working well.
- The style of management: parish councils etc, working with the people.
- Flexibility: the fact that parish priests move on after six years.
- The quality of sacramental ministry being done.
- The commitment to formation and empowerment of laity.
- Lay partnership in some places.

What needs improving?

- The low energy levels: risk of stagnation.
- Sense of identity and purpose; belief in future and that this work will go on.
- The follow-through from leadership.
- Outreach to young people and Vocations ministry
- Community life and our mission to evangelise
- Communication and the presentation of the Oblates
- Real engagement with lay people, including handing over responsibilities.
- Outreach to the wider community
- Use of the new technology to spread the message
- Clarity regarding the future of Oblates in specific parishes
- The handing back of parishes

Some emerging themes

- Proclaiming and living the Gospel in partnership with the people
- Authentic and humble searchers in the spirit of the Gospel
- Value of prayer and developing centres of contemplation
- Older Oblates, a very valuable asset in the province
- The Oblate charism is still vague and poorly communicated
- Responsibilities for charism and evangelisation belong to all of us.
- Formation of the laity is key to developing partnership for mission

Factors critical to refounding

- It has to be something radical, new and reinvigorating, linked to charism
- Oblates need to be identified with something specific
- True engagement with poor people of today
- Clarity regarding the future of Oblate parishes, all the complexities
- Improving communication with the community and in parish
- Moving beyond mindset of priest as recognised leader
- Partnership with lay people and drawing on professional skills





Factors critical to selecting new opportunities

- Must be specific regarding what we are to focus on in communities
- Act as a leaven, helping communities get established, build infra-structure and then take over leadership
- Work in team-based ministries with lay people
- Effective ministries are informed by research, and require knowledge and resources (financial and skills of professionals)
- There should be a balance between 'maintenance' and 'mission'.
- Any chosen priorities must be energising, partnership based, true to the charism, and achievable

Effective ministries are informed by research, and require knowledge and resources (financial support and professional skills)

There should be a balance between 'maintenance' and 'mission'.

Any chosen priorities must be energising, partnership based, true to the charism, and achievable

Potential focus areas/priorities

Emerging priorities seem to come under the broad heading of 'Evangelisation' – Bringing the Gospel to the People

1. Lay formation & leadership
 2. Outreach ministries
 3. Youth ministry
- Centres of spirituality and renewal
 - Vocations
 - Team-based ministries and partnerships
 - Work with new immigrant communities
 - Addiction rehabilitation services
 - Advocacy for social justice and the environment

Range of choices within Evangelisation theme

Within parish structure

Lay formation
Team ministries
Outreach groups
Prayer/bible study groups
Youth services
Parish council
Sacramental preparation

Outside parish structure

Spiritual renewal centre(s)
Team ministries
Parish mission team
Youth services
Outreach services and centres
Lay formation
IT services and media
Pilgrimages

Refounding Mission



Focus on Lay Formation/Leadership Development

Targets	Methods
Youth	Parish based
Young adults	Centres of excellence
Parents	IT and communications
Mature adults	Dedicated mobile teams
Disaffected/lapsed	Links with other groups
IT services and media	

Outreach ministries: options to be prioritised

Targets	Methods
Youth	Drop-in centres
Young families	Listening facilities
Victims of addiction	Prayer groups
Divorced/separated	Youth services
Disaffected/lapsed	Addiction services
Alienated/isolated	Advocacy services
Immigrants	Welfare services
Prisoners and ex-prisoners	Community development
Bereaved	Pastoral care teams
Socially excluded communities	Outreach teams
Sex offenders	IT and media
	Funding/grants
	Retreat/renewal centre(s)

Partnership has to include real responsibility, working together as a team, acknowledging the different gifts. Respect, trust, faith and common purpose are central.

We must be clear about what it is that we are inviting lay people into - roles, responsibilities, structures of participation etc, and what is meant by 'partners in mission'.

Range of options within youth ministry

Clubs	Works	Ed/training	Formation
Social	Outreach	Academic	Catechetics
Sports	Advocacy	Vocational	Pilgrimage
			Retreat Centres
			Vocations
Local, national, international Short/medium/long-term commitment Voluntary & paid roles			

Refounding Mission

Today we are called to faithfulness and to change. To be faithful to the mission to which we are called requires that we open ourselves to change.

The Steering Group welcome your reflections on further criteria you would like to see included, or any other ideas/suggestions you may wish to share.

Contact
Email address

mactj63@eircom.net



Choose in the light of the following realities/factors

- Only 44 Oblates in active ministry by 2010 and 34 by 2014
- Selected options won't be achieved by Oblate input alone — need a strong and clear partnership base with structures, resources, clear roles, clear responsibilities etc
- Limit selection to 3/4 priorities
- Further prioritise within the selected areas
- Make choices consistent with the charism and mission of St Eugene

Implications of selecting focussed ministries

- Withdrawal from successful/long established ministries
- Significant investment in terms of personnel and finances
- Restructuring of our current parish configuration and structures
- Development of partnerships with lay people; other Oblate Provinces; other Religious Orders; skilled people; other Christian denominations.
- Will require good leadership/management structures and commitment

Suggested criteria for selection of focussed ministries

- Is it consistent with the charism of Eugene de Mazenod?
- Will it energise Oblates and their partners?
- In addition to being challenging/stretching, is it achievable?
- Are we willing to make the investment that will make it happen?
- Has it the potential to make a real and worthwhile impact?
- Does it have a strong team/partnership based dimension?

Can you suggest further criteria?

- 1
- 2
- 3

■ Email suggestions: Tom McCabe (mactj63@eircom.net)

Grids for use in the prioritising/selecting process

The 'Prospectus' team has developed a series of grids, taking all key factors into account, to help us rank the various potential options that have emerged from the process to date.

Refounding Mission

Drafting a Vision Statement

What is a vision statement?

- describes the fundamental purpose of the the organisation
- serves as basis for effective planning
- articulates purpose for internal and external members
- clarifies what the organisation will/will not engage in
- answers question: 'Why do we exist?'
- ensures everyone is 'on the same page'
- inspiring, future orientated, easy to understand/communicate

Credible
Stretching
Attractive
Future

Vision Statement:

Make it brief, clear and concise

Describe what you do and how you do it

It should be inspiring and convincing

Make it proactive and action oriented

Keep it jargon-free!

Current working vision statement

To rekindle the charism of Eugene de Mazenod...to be in the world as radical, compassionate witnesses of God's love

The steering group reviewed some sample vision statements and draft Oblate vision statements prepared by Prospectus.

Key questions in developing vision statement

1. What is the opportunity for our province?
2. What do we want to achieve in the province?
3. How do we want to be perceived in 2012?
4. With what do the Oblates want to be synonymous?

The vision should drive the selected strategic priorities, so key words/guiding principles have to be incorporated into it.

Your suggestions are welcome

- The Steering Group would welcome your suggestions for a vision statement. We have been asked to draft a vision statement before the next work shop, March 23rd.
- Email suggestions: Tom McCabe (mactj63@eircom.net)

Next steps

1. Review feedback from this workshop and prepare for next one
2. Date and time of next workshop: 23 March 2007, 8.30 am — 12.30 pm, House of Retreat, Inchicore
3. Objective of workshop: to tease out and agree Strategic Objectives



Visit the Oblate website at:

www.oblatesai.org