

OBLATE CONNECTIONS

February 2025 | Nº63



Missionary Oblates
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CONNECTIONS

Pope Francis announced and proclaimed 2025 as a Jubilee Year on the first Sunday of Advent. He chose as the message of this Jubilee Year Pilgrims of Hope in Communion. What is the invitation and call to be Pilgrims of Hope this new year? We are each called to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Through this encounter we experience the love God has for us in Christ. Pope Francis said, that if God can visit us, even when our hearts seem like a lowly manger, we can truly say: hope is not dead. He encourages us to embrace this Jubilee 'with haste.' Even though each of us are called to respond personally to this invitation, it is by no means private. As active members of the Body of Christ, we are being called to be pilgrims in union and communion with each other. The image of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus with Jesus is good one to describe this jubilee pilgrimage. We are not walking on our own; we are to be aware of and connected to each other as followers of Christ who is walking with us by our side as our fellow pilgrim. Because Jesus is walking with us, we can face this journey with courage, confidence and hope – we are not alone – God is with us every step of the way. In the document to accompany the Jubilee Year, 'Hope does not disappoint', the pope asks that as well as finding hope in God's presence, we are also called to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us. The first sign of hope should be the desire for peace as war and violence around the world continues. He asks us to be tangible signs of hope for all our brothers and sisters who are poor and marginalised in any way; for prisoners, for those who are sick at home or in hospitals; for all those who are forced to become refugees and migrants, and the elderly who are often alone and isolated—all deserve signs of hope.

May this Jubilee Year encourage and strengthen our faith and hope in each other and God; as St. Paul reminds us; 'May God, the source of all hope fill you all with joy and peace by your faith in him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit.' (Romans 15.13).



This message and theme of Pilgrimage will take on a deeper meaning when we begin the Season of Lent in March. The tender and compassionate call from God during Lent is, 'Come back to me with all your heart.' (Joel 2.12-13). Just as with the Jubilee Year, we are not being asked to make our journey through Lent on our own, trying to change ourselves by relying on our own efforts. We are asked to follow the example of the person in the gospel who, with faith, hope, humility and courage, prayed from the depths of their heart, 'Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.' (Luke 18.13). They know they have sinned, but they also know they can come to God believing they are loved and forgiven. This is the example we are asked to follow and imitate during our Lenten journey.

Lent also challenges us to be aware of and concerned about those around who are struggling and suffering. Our Lenten Pilgrimage is personal, but never private. May these words from the Prophet Micah encourage us during the Jubilee Year and Lent; 'This is what the Lord asks of you, to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God'. (Micah 6.8)

- Br. Michael Moore, OMI

4

THE SPIRITUALITY
OF ST EUGENE
DE MAZENOD

6

MISSIONARY
HEARTS

8

ST ANNE'S

9

FRIENDS OF ST EUGENE

A word from Fr. Lorcan O'Reilly, OMI

Where does the time go? Here we are and we are already half way through February. We ended 2024 with lots of ups and downs and are living in a year filled with lots of uncertainties. There are lots of mixed messages all around us. Yet despite all this we are called to be pilgrims of hope. As Pope Francis put it on Christmas Eve: If God can visit us, even when our hearts seem like a lowly manger, we can truly say: Hope is not dead; hope is alive and it embraces our lives forever. Hope does not disappoint!



In the face of uncertainties we do well to lift our eyes and hearts to Mary. She points us to her Son. She brings us back to Jesus; she speaks to us of Jesus; she leads us to Jesus. She reminds us that Jesus came in the flesh, and that we encounter him above all in our daily life, in our own frail humanity and that of all those whom we encounter each day.

In praying to Our Lady as the Mother of Hope, we proclaim that he is the Saviour of the world, yet we are able to encounter him and are called to seek him in the face of every human being. May we learn, like her, to discover God's greatness in the little things of life. As we continue our journey into 2025 let us keep the example of Mary in mind and pray that the Lord may let his face shine upon us, look kindly upon us, bless all our families, and fill our hearts with his peace and joy.

- Fr. Lorcan O'Reilly, OMI
Province Leader

**“Hope is not dead;
hope is alive and it
embraces our lives
forever. Hope does
not disappoint!”**



THE SPIRITUALITY OF EUGENE DE MAZENOD

– Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

During the years I have been writing this column, I have rarely mentioned the fact that I belong to a religious order, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. That omission is not an evasion, since being an Oblate of Mary Immaculate is something of which I am quite proud. However, I rarely flag the fact that I am a priest and a member of a religious order because I believe what I write here and elsewhere needs to ground itself on things beyond titles.

In this column, however, I want to speak about the founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Saint Eugene de Mazenod, because what he had to say about Christian discipleship and spirituality is something of value and importance for everyone, like the legacies that have been left us by other great religious founders like Bernard, Francis, Dominic, Angela Merici, Ignatius of Loyola, Vincent de Paul, and others.

Saint Eugene de Mazenod (1779-1861) was a French bishop of aristocratic origins who some popular myths identify as the bishop in *Les Miserables*. He was a man whose personality ran somewhat naturally in the direction of the stern, the introverted, the strongly inner-directed, the mystical, and the single-minded. He wasn't the type of person most people would choose as their first choice for light dinner conversation, but he was the type of person who is often God's first choice to found a religious order.

Soren Kierkegaard once stated that to be a saint is to will the one thing. Eugene de Mazenod clearly did that and, in his case, that one thing had a number of aspects which, taken together, form the basis of a very rich, balanced spirituality – one which emphasises some salient aspects of Christian discipleship that are often neglected today.

What shaped the spirituality of Eugene de Mazenod and the charism he left behind?

First, he emphasised community. For him, a good life is not just one of individual achievement, fidelity, or even greatness; it is a life that links itself to the power

inherent within community. He was a firm believer in the axiom: what we dream alone remains a dream, what we dream with others can become a reality. In his view, compassion only becomes effective when it becomes collective, when it issues forth from a group rather than from just one individual. He believed that alone you can make a splash but not a difference. He founded a religious order because he deeply believed this.

In the face of all the issues confronting the world and the Church today, if someone were to ask him: "What's the one single thing I might do to make a difference?" He would reply: Connect yourself with others of sincere will within community, around the person of Christ. Alone you cannot save the world. Together we can!

Second, he believed that a healthy spirituality makes a marriage between contemplation and justice. Judged in the light of our contemporary sensitivities, his exact expression of this is perhaps linguistically awkward today, but his key principle is perennially valid: only an action that issues forth from a life that is rooted in prayer and deep interiority will be truly prophetic and effective. Conversely, all true prayer and genuine interiority will burst forth in action, especially in action for justice and the poor.

Third, in his own life and in the spirituality he laid out for his religious community, he made a strong preferential option for the poor. He did this not because it was the politically correct thing to do, but because it was the correct thing to do; the Gospel demands this, and it is non-negotiable. His belief was simple and clear: as Christians, we are called to be with and work with those whom nobody else wants to be with and work with. For him, any teaching or action that is not good news for the poor cannot claim to be speaking for Jesus or for scripture.





“What we dream alone remains a dream, what we dream with others can become a reality.”

Fourth, he put all of this under the patronage of the mother of Jesus, Mary, whom he saw as an advocate for the poor. He recognised that the poor turn to her, for it is she who gives voice to the Magnificat.

Finally, in his own life and in the ideal he laid out, he brought together two seemingly contradictory tendencies: a deep love for the institutional Church and the capacity to prophetically challenge it at the same time. He loved the Church, believed that it was the noblest thing for which one might die; but at the same time, he wasn't afraid to publicly point out the Church's faults or to admit that the Church needs constant challenge and self-criticism... and he was willing to offer it!

His personality was very different from mine. I doubt that he and I would spontaneously like each other. But that's incidental. I'm proud of his legacy, proud to be one of his sons, and convinced enough of his spirituality to give my life over for it.

Lent Day Retreats

24th-26th March

Suggested donation - £25 (includes lunch)

Enrich your Lenten journey through the transformative embrace of scripture, reflection, adoration and prayer. Experience Lent through a unique process of engagement that draws you deeply into this holy season. There is much wisdom in a text from the Psalms: 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Psalm 46.10). May our God who is rich in love and mercy, bless us all as we journey towards Easter.

Lent Weekend

28th-30th March

Suggested donation - £185

The liturgical season of Lent is meant to be a time of spiritual spring-training, so to speak: a special time during which we prepare for Holy Week. Our Lenten retreat is an opportunity to prepare our hearts to commemorate and celebrate the mystery of Easter.

The Weekend will include reflective inputs, prayer times and some quiet times, and opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation or talk one-to-one with a trained Spiritual Director. Spend this weekend in silent retreat saying "yes" to God. As St Teresa of Avila reminds us, "Prayer is the lifting up of mind and heart to God".

WISTASTON HALL OBLATE RETREAT AND SPIRITUALITY CENTRE



Triduum Weekend

17th-20th April

Suggested donation - £275

This is an opportunity for you to discover the Sacred "Three Days" (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday) leading up to Easter.

This retreat begins at 6pm on Holy Thursday with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the Washing of the Feet. It includes time for personal and communal prayer as well as the opportunity to fully participate in each of the services.

For Information or Booking

Contact Rachel: +44 01270 568653 or email: rachel.challoner@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk

Oblate Retreat Centre, Wistaston Hall, 89 Broughton Lane, Crewe, CW2 8JS

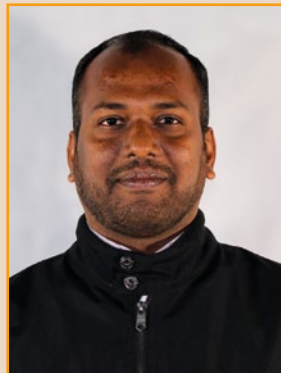
Download a booking form or book online: www.orc-crewe.org

Missionary Hearts

A Warm Welcome To Our New Oblates In The Anglo-Irish Province

Over the last year we have had a few new faces join our Oblate Family here in the Anglo-Irish Province. We invite you to get to know them a bit better as they take this opportunity to introduce themselves and share about their experiences and roles living and working in this province.

Stepping off the plane at Heathrow Airport for the first time, I was filled with a mix of excitement and nervousness. It was my first international experience, and the unfamiliar chill of the London air quickly reminded me that this was going to be a new chapter in every way. Frs. Ray and Johnson greeted me warmly, and as we stepped outside into the freezing cold, their first advice was clear: "Get yourself a proper winter jacket!"



I come from a humble yet deeply faith-filled background. Born on June 27, 1993, in Vellarenthal, a small village in the Diocese of Sivagangai, Tamil Nadu, South India. I grew up in a loving Catholic family. My father, Mr. Jesuraj, is a farmer and a catechist, and my mother, Mrs. Jayamary, a devoted homemaker. I am the youngest of three, with an elder brother, Mr. Ilangeswaran, serving in the Indian Army, and an elder sister, Mrs. Kulandai Therese.

My parents' unwavering faith laid the foundation for my vocation. From a young age, I was inspired by the lives of Catholic priests and the Christian Brothers at my school. Their dedication to God and service to others ignited a desire in me to follow in their footsteps. During high school, a visit from Fr. Benedict OMI, the vocation director introduced me to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. His words about the Oblate missionary vocation deeply resonated with me. I shared my desire to join, and that decision set me on a path of formation, faith, and growth.

On May 29, 2022, I was ordained as an Oblate Priest - a day filled with gratitude and a renewed commitment to serve wherever I was needed. One of my formators often said, "After becoming a priest, never think of staying in one place. Be ready to go wherever you are called." These words guided me as I received my first obedience to the Anglo-Irish Province.

Today, I serve at Sacred Heart Church, Kilburn, London, a vibrant parish with a beautifully diverse community. The parishioners' warmth and openness have made me feel at home. Every day brings a new experience - be it working with young adults, promoting justice and peace, visiting the sick, or engaging in various parish activities. Each moment enriches my Oblate vocation, reaffirming the joy of serving God's people.

I am deeply grateful to Fr. Oliver, Fr. Lorcan, my Kilburn community (Tom, Brian, Johnson, Michael), and all the Oblates for their unwavering support. From the time of processing my visa to the countless ways they have helped me settle into this new chapter of my life, their kindness and encouragement have been invaluable.

One incident particularly touched me. Fr. Tom shared a story about a parishioner who once asked him, "What makes you priests so different?" Fr. Tom's simple yet profound response was, "We are called to do the same; it is our mission." These words summarise the essence of our Oblate calling: to bring God's love and hope to all, especially to those on the margins.

The Anglo-Irish Province has a rich history of Oblates tirelessly working for the community. Being part of this legacy is both humbling and inspiring. I look forward to continuing this mission, learning from the people I serve, and growing in my faith and ministry.

My journey from a small village in Tamil Nadu to the bustling streets of London is a testament to God's grace and the power of saying "yes" to His call. As I walk this path, I carry with me the lessons from my family, my formation, and the communities I serve. Every challenge, every smile, and every shared moment of faith reminds me why I chose this vocation - to be an instrument of God's love in the world.

– Ilango Jesuraj, OMI
Sacred Heart Church, Kilburn



I am Emmanuel Godfrey Joel and from Sri Lanka, Jaffna Province. I was ordained in 2004 and a priest for 21 years. I am currently based in the Oblate Centre of Mission on the island of Anglesey, North Wales.

I felt called to become an Oblate and joined the Juniorate when I was 15. This year marks my 35th year in the congregation. Looking back on my life,

I can recognise the many moments where God used me for His mission. My vocation story is profound, reminding me that each moment is an opportunity to remain open to encountering Jesus in a deeply personal way.

I strive to remain open to the needs of the mission, in the Anglo- Irish province, embracing both my strengths and weaknesses.

– Emmanuel Godfrey Joel, OMI
Oblate Centre of Mission, Anglesey



I am Chinnappan Sandhappan OMI, from Tamil Nadu, India.

I have completed 27 years as an Oblate priest, serving both in India and abroad.

I have been appointed as the assistant priest at Our Lady of the Wayside Parish, Bluebell, Dublin. I reside at the Retreat House in Inchicore, Dublin.

My vocation is a divine gift to be lived and experienced fully in communion with God, and a call to share His love and mission beyond boundaries, serving others with compassion and joy.

It has been a month and a half since I arrived in Ireland, a period of acclimatisation to the people, culture and

situations. During this time, I have observed a strong desire for a synodal approach in pastoral fields, expressed by both priests and the faithful. This resonates deeply with me and inspires me to contribute meaningfully. I am in a process of learning and discerning how best to involve myself in this shared mission.

– Chinnappan Sandhappan, OMI
Our Lady of the Wayside Parish, Bluebell



I am Fr. Lylie Fernando, Sri Lankan by birth and have been a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate in the Oblate Province of Colombo, Sri Lanka. I have celebrated my 25th anniversary of Religious Priesthood in 2023 and have served in Parish, Preaching, Formation and School ministry of the Province. At present I am serving as the Assistant Priest

in the Oblate Community of St. Mary's Star of the Sea Church, Leith, Edinburgh, Scotland.

At the age of twelve I had the desire to become a priest. I let my mother, siblings and the parish priest know about my future undertaking and I received their blessings and moral support. At the same time, I was an active teenager in my home parish community. I discharged my duties as a member of the Legion of Mary and as an Altar Server. While I was contemplating and praying over this idea, one fine day in my college I came into contact with an Oblate Vocation Director who visited our college in search of candidates for priesthood. I met him personally and expressed my desire to become a priest and from then on we exchanged letters and eventually I was invited to take part in a couple of Vocation Camps held in the Oblate Junior Seminary in Colombo. With the passage of time I sat for the placement test and then was called for an interview. Looking at my test marks and on the strength of the letter given by my parish priest I was selected to the Oblate Junior Seminary and I entered the seminary at the age of sixteen.

As Oblates we are an international team. Becoming aware of the changing nature of the mission as a Missionary Oblate I am ready to undertake and give my fullest cooperation to any kind of ministry that I am entrusted with for the greater good of the mission of the Anglo-Irish Province.

– Fr. Lylie Fernando, OMI
St. Mary's Star of the Sea Church, Leith

International/Intercultural Mass,
Birmingham – 28 July 2024

ST ANNE'S PARISH

St. Anne's RC Church in Birmingham was part of the Oblate Anglo-Irish Province from 1938 until 2010. During this time many of the parishioners became committed members of the Oblate Family. They still have a thriving Friends of Saint Eugene group in the parish who keep the Oblate charism alive in the parish community.

In April of 2005 the Oblate Pastoral Congress for Lay People was held at Wistaston Hall and each Parish was asked to bring some objects to symbolise what their Parish was like. Kilburn Parish described how their Parish had changed from Irish Green to the Rainbow Nation of numerous nationalities. On Sunday 28 July nearly 20 years later, St Anne's Birmingham showed how it was now exactly the same as Kilburn.

At a Friends of St Eugene meeting earlier in the year there was a discussion about celebrating the Feast Day of St Anne's on 26 July. We also discussed the successful BBQ held in 2023 and what can be done to bring together the parishioners for Summer 2024. It was from this conversation that feedback was shared with our parish priest and the idea for the International/Intercultural Mass on 28 July was born.

As it had happened two days previously along the River Seine in Paris, the Mass began with a parade of flags carried by representatives from various countries: England, Ireland, Poland, Nigeria, Congo, South Sudan, Tanzania, China, India, Iran, Guyana, Brazil. The usual list of readers had a week off as parishioners representing the breadth of the Parish took centre stage. The Bidding Prayers were a mix of Guyanese, Nigerian, Indian, French and Irish nationalities leading the prayers in their native language. The Our Father Prayer was spoken in everyone's national language. As one would expect, children in their national costume brought up the Offertory gifts. One of the highlights was also during the distribution of Holy Communion, Pitor Maziarz, the Polish Organist who would usually play a piece by



J.S. Bach, stood to one side, as a choir of five Nigerians and a toddler in arms sang accompanied by the music on a mobile phone held near the microphone. A round of applause duly followed.

Fr Robert the Parish Priest reminded and encouraged the congregation to continue the celebration after mass in the Hall next door. The range of food available reflected the wide diversity of the Parish today. From a West Indian fish dish, to a range of rice and chicken dishes from East Africa, Asia, India, South America, plus a Sunday roast with beef, potatoes, boiled ham and cabbage. The dessert table was to "die for" with many sweet examples on display – especially the Polish Apple Cake and various high calorific trays of goodies provided by the Jesuit Senior Seminarians who are training in Birmingham and had been invited to the event. As our Parish Priest had said at the beginning of the mass, this was an opportunity to share and appreciate our cultural differences in the hope that we can be more sensitive to the spiritual and pastoral needs of those around us and get to know each other more.

The whole affair definitely offers that opportunity to interact with each other in the congregation that we see at mass but rarely have the occasion to talk to in detail. One can easily say, food and eating brings people together and what follows then is a building of relationships and a strong parish community. Everyone played a part to a successful first international mass celebration.

We look forward to our next celebration.

– John Curtin and Marilyn Bissondial
FOSE – St Anne's Birmingham

Friends of St. Eugene

The Friends of St. Eugene group, which meets monthly at St. Joseph's Community Centre, is a joyous gathering which lifts my spirits and it is a cherished sanctuary for me. It is a space where warmth and acceptance envelop everyone, creating an atmosphere that fosters prayer, reflection, and an opportunity to simply be. The fellowship of this community provides a sacred space to share openly and authentically, offering a sense of safety and mutual support that I find profoundly beneficial and inspiring too.

The moments of adoration we share I find deeply transformative. Sitting in the real presence is a cathartic and wonderful experience that soothes the burdens of my busy life. Between the demands of work and the ceaseless tasks of home, my evenings often leave me weary and drained. However, these gatherings offer a reprieve, ushering in a much-needed sense of peace and stillness. It is a time to reconnect with what truly matters and to let my soul rest in divine presence which recharges my batteries and enlivens my being.



At each session we bring food to share and in those times of sitting at table together we smile, laugh and just be.

Learning about the life of St. Eugene is an added blessing. His story is both inspiring and instructive, offering insights that guide me on my own spiritual journey. These meetings are a vital source of renewal, grounding me in faith, community, and the enduring love of God.

The Friends of St. Eugene meet on the second Thursday of each month at 6.45pm at St. Joseph's Community centre.

– Tom MacLean

CREWE

The Renewal Service for the Crewe Friends of Saint Eugene has taken place during the third weekend of Advent at the Wistaston Hall Oblate Retreat Centre. We were given a very warm welcome by Kirk and Jenny, followed by Mass, led by Father Oliver.

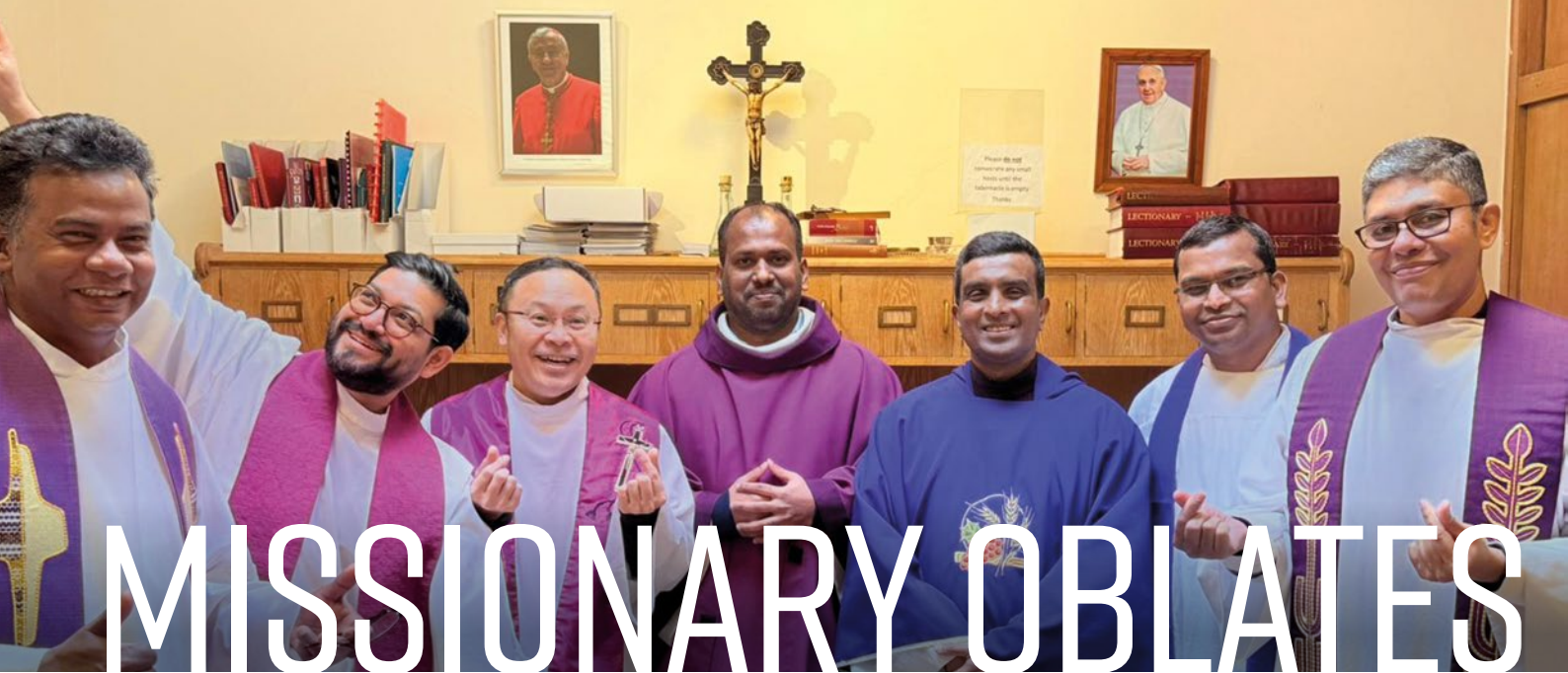
The Gospel reading (Luke 3, 10-18) about the ministry of John the Baptist helped us reflect on the question, "What should I do?" and this sentence "I baptised you with water but someone is coming who will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and Fire."

Together the group committed to their friendship, prayer and service. We prayed for the newly arrived group of migrants from Calais crossings living in a local hotel and considered their immediate needs.

We thank Father Oliver, Kirk, Jenny and the Kitchen staff at the Hall for the generous shared table which followed our Service of Renewal.

– Sheelagh Birtchnell





The Overseas Missionary Oblates of the Anglo-Irish Province recently convened for their annual gathering in Kilburn, London; a time dedicated to deepening their bonds of mission and reflecting on their shared calling. This group of nine Oblates represents a diverse range of countries and cultures, united by their commitment to missionary work and their shared Oblate spirituality. The gathering is a moment for them to connect, recharge, and share the stories of their unique experiences of working in a foreign country.

The Oblates of the Anglo-Irish province come from a variety of backgrounds, each bringing their own perspectives and experiences to the collective mission. Currently, there are nine international Oblates serving in the province, hailing from Sri Lanka, India, the Philippines, Mexico, and Poland. These individuals form a vibrant international community, each contributing to the province's mission through their work in parishes, schools, various ministries and social outreach programs.

Twice a year, the Oblates of the Anglo-Irish province gather together for a retreat-style meeting. These meetings are held in various locations, with the most recent one taking place in Kilburn, a vibrant area in North London known for its large Irish community. These gatherings provide an opportunity for the Oblates to step away from their individual missions, reflect on their work, and support one another in the challenges they face.

This annual meeting provides a space for the Oblates to talk openly about their successes, struggles, and the ways in which their work impacts the lives of those they serve. The sharing of experiences fosters mutual understanding, builds solidarity, and strengthens their sense of community. Through these exchanges, they are able to learn from one another, find encouragement, and gain new perspectives on their ministry.

“Meeting one another and hearing the profound stories of life’s struggles was a blessing, leaving us in awe of the resilience and faith that define the Oblate mission.”

A central figure in the gathering was Fr. Lorcan, the Provincial of the Anglo-Irish province. As the leader of the province, Fr. Lorcan's role is to guide and support the Oblates in their mission. During the three days of meetings, he dedicated time to personally connect with each of the members, listening to their experiences, offering affirmation, and providing guidance where needed.

Together, the Oblates and Fr. Lorcan prayed as one family, strengthening their sense of unity within the larger Oblate congregation. This time of prayer also included the local Kilburn community, further highlighting the importance of connection between the international Oblates and the local faithful.

In addition to the faith and communal elements of the gathering, the Oblates also engaged in development activities. One of the highlights of the gathering was a leadership session led by Anne, the province's HR leader. Anne, who has extensive experience in leadership development, led a thought-provoking session on the characteristics of a good line manager. Drawing comparisons between the business world and the Oblate model, she explored the key qualities that make a good leader in both secular and religious contexts.



GATHER IN KILBURN



Anne's workshop included a discussion of the barriers to effective leadership, such as cultural expectations, gender dynamics, and organisational norms that can sometimes hinder good leadership. She also guided the Oblates through an interactive exercise where they reflected on their own leadership styles and considered ways to improve their effectiveness in their missionary roles.

The gathering in Kilburn was not just a time of reflection on the past but also an opportunity to look forward. The Oblates left the meeting re-energised and inspired to continue their mission with renewed commitment. The support and encouragement they received from one another, as well as the insights shared during the leadership session, have strengthened their resolve to live out the Oblate charism of service, humility, and dedication to the poor and marginalised.

Fr Johnson told us that: "Attending the meeting of the young oblates was an experience filled with inspiration, reflection, and shared purpose. As we gathered in one space, united as oblates, I felt a deep sense of family, a bond that transcended backgrounds and cultures. The dialogues were honest and heartfelt, asking the question how can we better serve as oblates in our communities? One of the most impactful moments was during the open forum, where we were encouraged to voice

our ideas and concerns. It was a humbling reminder that even in leadership, vulnerability is a strength. Outside the meetings, there were opportunities for informal conversations and moments of laughter over shared meals. These interactions deepened our bonds and reminded me of the importance of fraternity in ministry. This experience affirmed not only my vocation but also the beauty of unity in diversity, as we strive together to live out our calling in service to God and His children."

Fr Illango added: "Lorcan's sharing about the superiors' meeting was deeply inspiring. He quoted the Superior General's profound words, reminding us that the Oblate way of life is rooted in prayer and community, a true reflection of family where mutual care and support are at the heart. He beautifully highlighted that it is not just about being multicultural but truly intercultural—embracing diversity while living in solidarity with the many faces of poverty. HR Anne's sharing on the Oblate model added another layer of inspiration. She reminded us that Oblate life is not defined by clerical status but by a spirit of inculturation—immersing ourselves into ministry with humility, courage, and an awareness of the real challenges that come with it. Meeting one another and hearing the profound stories of life's struggles was a blessing, leaving us in awe of the resilience and faith that define the Oblate mission. It was a powerful reminder of the beauty and depth of our shared calling."

As the Oblates of the Anglo-Irish province continue to serve in their respective missions, their time together in Kilburn serves as a reminder of the strength that comes from community. In the face of challenges, whether in their work, leadership, or personal lives, they know they can always turn to each other for support, encouragement, and inspiration.

– Written by Fr Vimal Parunanthu OMI and Jenny Forti (Oblate Communications Team)

MISSIONARY OBLATES AT THE UNITED NATIONS



The Oblates advocate for human rights and the well-being of the most vulnerable through collaborations with organisations like VIVAT International and the Coalition of Religious for Justice. In this article, Benoît reflects on the work of the Missionary Oblates at the UN and their commitment to justice and peace.

The Missionary Oblates' Journey to the UN and VIVAT International

In 2004, the Superior General sent Father Daniel LeBlanc on a mission to the UN, where the Missionary Oblates were recognised as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). Initially, Father Daniel worked with Franciscans International, advocating at the United Nations for respect for human dignity and environmental justice using a human rights-based approach.

The Missionary Oblates soon joined VIVAT International, an NGO founded in November 2000. The name "VIVAT," derived from the Latin word vivere (meaning "to live"), symbolises a commitment to life for all. VIVAT International will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2025. Two Missionary Oblates are directly involved with VIVAT: Father Daniel LeBlanc, who represents VIVAT International at the UN, and Father Daquin Iyo, who represents the organisation at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi.

VIVAT International: A Global Commitment to Human Rights and Justice

Today, VIVAT International is a global network with over 17,000 members from 12 Catholic religious congregations, working in 121 countries. The organisation's mission is to promote human rights through advocacy at both international and local levels. Its members strive to support the most vulnerable and oppressed, addressing the root causes of poverty, injustice, discrimination, violence, and unsustainable development.

In 2017, the Missionary Oblates, alongside 22 other NGOs, formed the Coalition of Religious for Justice (JCoR). This initiative strengthens the capacity of Catholic religious congregations working in the field and those who represent them at the United Nations. Religious NGOs, recognised for their moral presence, advocate for the poor and marginalised, seeking justice, peace, and sustainable development for all.

The Coalition of Religious for Justice: Strengthening Advocacy and Collaboration

The Coalition of Religious for Justice (JCoR) uses an operational model of cross-congregational collaboration, which allows for a deeper analysis and stronger promotion of justice and peace across ministries at local, national, regional, and global levels. By leveraging existing infrastructure and engaging strategic partners, JCoR seeks to:

1. Strengthen the justice and peacebuilding skills of coalition members at all levels.
2. Improve communication related to justice and peace between congregations.
3. Share resources and coordinate efforts across ministries.
4. Implement joint justice and peace campaigns aimed at policy makers at multiple levels.

Through these partnerships, JCoR focuses on addressing justice, peace, and the integrity of creation (JPIC), in line with the Oblates' Rule of Life and the objectives outlined by their General Chapters. Living the Mission: Promoting Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation.

Saint Eugene de Mazenod, founder of the Missionary Oblates, wrote in the Preface of the Oblates' Rule: "We must first strive to lead people to act as human beings, then as Christians, and finally, we must help them to become saints." This guiding principle remains central to the work of the Missionary Oblates and their partners. The inter-congregational coalitions at the UN and beyond demonstrate that collective action can drive meaningful change. By rolling up their sleeves and working together, Oblates and their collaborators help improve the lives of those in poverty and protect our common home for future generations.

For more information, visit:

- The United Nations (<https://news.un.org/fr/>)
- VIVAT International (<https://www.vivatinternational.org/>)
- Coalition of Religious for Justice (<https://jcor2030.org/>)

Let us live in the spirit and mission of VIVAT International: living faith through action and making the world a better place for all.

- Benoît DOSQUET, OMI



PILGRIMAGE TO ROME YOUTH JUBILEE

28 JULY - 4 AUGUST

Throughout 2025, Our Church around the world celebrates a yearlong “event of great spiritual, ecclesial, and social significance in the life of the Church.” The Holy Year, under the theme of “Pilgrims of Hope,” marks the 2,025th anniversary of the Incarnation of the Lord. Catholics are encouraged to make pilgrimage during the year, either to Rome or to a sacred site within their local diocese. The Holy Father has also marked special celebrations throughout 2025 for various needs and communities.

Youth and young adults are invited to Rome for the international celebration of the Jubilee of Young People from Monday to Sunday, July 28 to August 3, 2025. During that week, youth and young adults from around the world will journey to the Eternal City for the pilgrimage experience of a lifetime.

Schedule of Events

Monday, July 28:

Arrivals and settling into accommodation

Tuesday, July 29:

6:00-7:30pm: Welcome

Holy Mass by the Diocese of Rome in Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, July 30 - Thursday, July 31:

Cultural, artistic, and spiritual activities throughout the city of Rome

Friday, August 1:

10:30am-6:00pm: Opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the Circus Maximus (Circo Massimo) in Rome

Saturday, August 2:

3:00-8:00pm: Entertainment, welcome with music and testimonies at Tor Vergata

8:30-9:30pm: Evening Vigil with the Holy Father at Tor Vergata

Sunday, August 3:

9:30am: Holy Mass presided over by the Holy Father at Tor Vergata

Express your interest to Fr Eduardo or Padraig

Padraig Corcoran:

oys@oblates.co.uk or oys@oblates.ie

Fr Eduardo Nunez-Yepe OMI:

e.yepe@oblates.ie

Places are limited and are part sponsored by The Oblates. Age 18-35

[RETURN TO CONTENTS PAGE](#)



The Visit

My experience during the visit of Saint Bernadette's Relics in Dublin

Every now and then, you realise that you are part of something historic, quite possibly, a once-in-a-lifetime moment. And in that situation, you don't want to miss anything; you know that in the months and years ahead, you want to recall each and every part of this special time.

So it was when the relics of St Bernadette visited the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Inchicore, Dublin in October 2024. They arrived just before lunch on Wednesday, October 23 and left for the Franciscan church of Adam & Eve's on Merchant's Quay in Dublin, before lunch on Friday. And between those two times, the arrival of the relics and their departure, was one of the most amazing times ever in Inchicore.

For me, the reality of the visit struck home when I arrived at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Mullingar, to collect the relics and drive them to Inchicore. I always knew that this would be a special trip but from the moment that I sat behind the wheel, with the relics, and a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes securely stowed behind, I was aware of the sacredness of this time. Usually, when in a vehicle alone, I turn on the radio – but not that day. Initially, I was silent, taking it in, the incredible privilege of the journey that I was making, and as the journey began, and I left Mullingar behind, I started to pray! It was the most natural thing in the world. I prayed the Rosary, taking my time, almost sensing as I did so, that St Bernadette was right there with me, answering the prayers. And when I had finished the Rosary, I just talked to St Bernadette! I'm sure other drivers must have looked at me in the van, wondering, "who is he speaking with?" – but I knew!

The journey was over all too quickly, and that memory will live on. As soon as I arrived in Inchicore, the team brought the relics into the church, where great preparation had been made, and the work began for the re-opening of the church at 1:30pm, before the Welcome Liturgy at 2:00pm. People began to gather outside the closed doors of the church from about 1:00pm; already, the feeling in the air of something very special taking place. And really, over the two days of the visit, that sense never left the place. On Wednesday, the church was open until 9:00pm. On Thursday, it opened at

8:00am and closed at 9:00pm. Throughout all of those hours, the church was never quiet and certainly, never empty. For the liturgies, the church was standing room only, with people standing in the aisle and every available seating place (including extra seating installed for the visit) fully occupied. And no-one complained; there was always that feeling of the privilege felt by being present. Standing, or waiting in a queue, was a small price to pay for the opportunity to be there during those days. And it wasn't just the people of Inchicore and the nearby areas of Bluebell, Kilmainham, Ballyfermot, and other neighbourhoods. People came from all parts of the city and indeed, beyond the city, from parts of Kildare, Meath, and Wicklow. I even heard of people who came from Galway, as they wanted to visit the relics when they were in the "Irish Lourdes" as the Grotto in Inchicore is often called!

Everything about this visit was special. The primary purpose behind the visit of the relics was to give those who have not been able to go to Lourdes, the opportunity for a 'Lourdes pilgrimage experience' at home. For this reason, we had the water gesture, replicating the baths experience and which took place at the Grotto in Inchicore, we had the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and blessing of the sick, following the example of the Blessed Sacrament Procession and adoration that takes place every afternoon in Lourdes at 5:00pm. And of course, we had the Torchlight Marian Procession, echoing the same procession that occurs in Lourdes every night of the week at 9:00pm. In those moments, in those three actions in particular, the reality of a Lourdes pilgrimage experience in Inchicore came to life. The water gesture involved washing ones hand and face with water brought from the spring in Lourdes. It was a profound experience to watch as people queued at the Grotto for their turn, and then, with the same sense of the sacred that is present in Lourdes, had the water poured over their hands, washed, and prayed. Equally, the Torchlight Procession was a profound experience of the presence of God and of the love for Our Lady. There was a moment when it felt like it was going to rain heavily but it passed, the procession commenced. The church was crowded, the church grounds, now in darkness of course, were crowded. And once the opening prayers were recited,

the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, carried by a team from the Oblate Youth Service and accompanied by a local Scout troop, made its way from the church door, through the school grounds, around the basketball centre, and on to the Oblate garden that adjoins the Grotto. We processed past the Community Cemetery, the final resting place of so many Oblates. What would they have thought of this moment, I wondered. And of course, there was a certain poignancy in this for those of us who are associated with the pilgrimage itself as on the previous Monday, only three days earlier, the former Director of the pilgrimage and a wonderful friend to so many, Fr Vincent Mulligan OMI, was laid to rest in that same cemetery. He would have been so thrilled with this moment! If, for a few minutes, you could tell your mind that you were not in the Oblate garden in Inchicore, it was almost possible to believe that this is the same Torchlight Procession in which we have participated in Lourdes for decades. We held our candles, we said our rosary, we sang, lifting our candles for the 'Ave' – and we walked in the darkness, following the Statue of Our Lady, the same person who, through St Bernadette, had invited us to “come in procession.”

And we were, not in Lourdes this time, but in Inchicore. An incredible, powerful, experience and the memory of which will last to the end of my days.

All too soon, this visit was over. But in those days, thousands of people came to venerate the relics, to have those few moments of personal quiet and person prayer standing next to the reliquary containing the relics. Who can imagine the prayers said there? And those who came were the old and the young, families, the sick, the infirm. And what was inspiring throughout was that, even for the young, without being told, there was the unspoken realisation that this was not an 'Instagram' moment – no! It didn't need to be said. To see young couples, individual young people, and families, standing in line, quietly, waiting their turn to stand at the reliquary and venerate the relics, it was clear that the sacredness of the time was being felt, experienced, and lived. This was, truly, a visit for which words cannot do justice. It was a visit that was felt deep inside, and one whose memory will live on.

– T. Gerard Bennett
President of the Oblate Lourdes Hospitalité

Camino De Santiago

APRIL 20-27

Join us this Easter on the journey of the Camino de Santiago – walking the Way of Saint James. Inspired by the experience of the disciples of Emmaus, we want to encounter the Risen Lord in our lives and in those who walk alongside us.

The Camino de Santiago is a life-changing experience. The journey, whether undertaken for spiritual reasons, as a personal challenge, or simply as a way to explore a beautiful part of the world, tends to have a profound impact on those who embark on it. There's something about the rhythm of walking, the solitude, the moments of connection with others, and the sense of reaching the end after a long journey that often brings clarity, healing, and transformation.

For many, the physical demands of the pilgrimage push them to reflect deeply on their lives, while the communal aspects—meeting fellow pilgrims from all over the world—often lead to unexpected moments of personal insight.



€750

PPS

*Subject to price of flights

Price Includes, transport, accommodation, pilgrim pack, and spiritual director.. pilgrims are responsible for their own food expenses along the way. Accommodation is a mixture of hotels and hostels depending on availability.

For more information, please contact:
Fr Eduardo Nunez: e.yepezo@oblates.ie
Gerard Bissett: gerardbissett@gmail.com

Places are limited to 15. Age 18-35

[RETURN TO CONTENTS PAGE](#)

Pilgrims of Hope

OBLATE LOURDES PILGRIMAGE 2025

14th - 19th September 2025

*Experience the grace of the Jubilee at the
Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, a Jubilee Pilgrimage Site.
For more information contact:*

Dublin: Barbara

01 454 2888
lourdes@oblates.ie

London: Fr Tom, Juliet

(020 7624 1701
Kilburn@rcdow.org.uk

Edinburgh: Fr Ray, Kathy

0131 554 2482
info@stmarysstarofthesea.org

Manchester: Kirk

020 7624 7296
k.jacob@oblates.co.uk

Prices available soon at: www.oblatelourdespilgrimage.com

If you would like to share your thoughts or ideas with us please contact Oblate Communications,
Ireland: 11E Emmet Court, St Vincent St West, Dublin 8, D08 KHY7
UK: Oblate Retreat Centre, Wistaston Hall, 89 Broughton Lane, Crewe, CW2 8J
or email: communications@oblates.ie

[RETURN TO CONTENTS PAGE](#)



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