



Missionary Oblates  
– Always Close to the People

**FREE**  
Please Take One

# Oblate Connections

Oblate Connections – No.43, 21st May, 2019

As I reflected on the various articles in this issue of Connections I found myself being reminded of the importance of hope in our lives. When at times the news seems to be full of negative stories or stories about 'fake news' it can be easy to lose sight of the signs of the good news that are around us. Yet as Christians we are invited to be ready to give an account for the hope that is within us.

Our story from the archives is an introduction to Con Scollen and his commitment to the mission of bringing hope to the first nations peoples of North America. As you will read, his was not an easy journey and he encountered many obstacles along the way, but it is a fascinating story of a man who can be described as a 'witness to hope'.

In his Easter homily this year, Pope Francis reflected on the importance of hope using the image of the women bringing spices to the tomb: they found a stone blocking the entrance, and feared their journey had been in vain. "The journey of those women is also our own. At times, it seems that everything comes up against a stone... We can be tempted to

think that dashed hope is the bleak law of life. Today however we see that our journey is not in vain... A single phrase astounds the woman and changes history: 'Why do you seek the living among the dead?'... Easter is the feast of tombstones taken away, rocks rolled aside" Pope Francis also invites each of us to identify the stone we personally need to roll back from our hearts. He spoke about the "stone of discouragement" which is what blocks hope, he said. "Once we start thinking everything is going badly... we lose heart...we become cynical, negative and despondent ... The Lord is not to be found in resignation ... He is not the God of the dead but of the living. Do not bury hope".

As we journey through this Easter season we are invited not to give in to sentiments of discouragement, fear or even despair. Instead we are called to keep our eyes fixed on the person of Christ who is the Living One and who ultimately is the source of the hope within us all.

– Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly OMI

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<a href="#">On Suicide and Despair</a> .....	2
<a href="#">The Muslim who saved the Church</a> .....	4
<a href="#">I wait for you outside</a> .....	6
<a href="#">The Art of Faith</a> .....	8
<a href="#">"You cannot evangelise a culture you don't love"</a> .....	10
<a href="#">From the Archives</a> .....	12
<a href="#">Crewe events</a> .....	15
<a href="#">Lourdes Pilgrimage 2019</a> .....	16



[www.oblates.ie](http://www.oblates.ie)

# On Suicide. *and Despair*

– *Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI*

For centuries, suicide was considered as an act of despair and despair itself was seen as the most grievous sin of all. In many religious circles, despair was seen as the most sinful of all acts and ultimately unforgivable.

Sadly, a strong residue of that remains, suicide is still seen by many as an act of despair, an affront to God and to life itself, an unforgivable relinquishing of hope. Many church people still see suicide as an act of despair and as the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit. But this is a misunderstanding. Suicide is not an act of despair and is not an act which cannot be forgiven. That suicide is an act of despair is not what the Christian Churches, and certainly not the Roman Catholic Church, believe or teach.

My purpose here is not to disparage what our churches teach about either suicide or despair, but rather to highlight with more accuracy what they do teach. The same holds true for people who still believe that suicide is an act of despair and an unforgivable sin. I am not disparaging their belief but trying rather to free them from a false fear (based on a misunderstanding) which surely must cause them grief and anxiety vis-à-vis loved ones who have died by suicide.

Suicide is not despair. Dictionaries define despair as the complete lack or absence of hope. But that's not what happens in most suicides. What does happen?

The person who is taking his or her own life is not intending that act as an insult or affront to God or to life (for that would be an act of strength and suicide is generally the antithesis of that). What happens in most suicides is the polar opposite. The suicide is the result of a mammoth defeat.

There's a powerful scene in the musical adaptation of Victor Hugo's, *Les Misérables*. A young woman, Fantine, lies dying. She tells of once being youthful and full of hopeful dreams; but now worn-down by a lifetime of poverty, crushed by a broken heart, and overcome by physical illness, she is defeated and has to submit to the tearful fact that "there are storms we cannot weather".

She's right, and anyone who does not accept that truth will one day come to a painful and bitter understanding of it. There are things in this life that will crush us, and surrender isn't an act of despair and indeed isn't a free act at all. It's a humbling, sad defeat.

And that's the case with most people who die from suicide. For reasons ranging from mental illness to an infinite variety of overpowering storms that can break a person, there's sometimes a point in people's lives where they are overpowered, defeated, and unable to continue to will their own living – parallel to one who dies as a victim of a drought, hurricane, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, or Alzheimer's. There's no sin in being overpowered by a deadly storm. We can be overpowered, and some people are, but that's not despair (which can only be willful and an act of strength).

To begin with, we don't understand mental illness, which can be just as a real and just as death-producing as any physical illness. We don't blame someone for dying from cancer, a stroke, or a physical accident, but we invariably cast moral shadows on someone who dies as a result of various mental illnesses which play a deadly role in many suicides. Happily, God is still in charge and our flawed understanding, while generally permanently tainting the way someone is remembered in this world, doesn't effect salvation on the other side.

Beyond mental illness we can be defeated in life by many other things. Tragedy, heart-breaking loss, unrequited obsession, and crippling shame can at times break a heart, crush a will, kill a spirit, and bring death to a body. And our judgment on this should reflect our understanding of God: What all-loving, merciful God would condemn someone because he or she, like Victor Hugo's, Fantine, could not weather the storm? Does God side with our own



narrow notions where salvation is mostly reserved for the strong? Not if Jesus is to be believed.

Notice when Jesus points out sin he doesn't point to where we are weak and defeated; rather he points to where we are strong, arrogant, indifferent, and judgmental. Search the Gospels and ask this question: On whom is Jesus hardest? The answer is clear: Jesus is hardest on those who are strong, judgmental, and have no feeling for those who are enduring the storm. Notice what he says about the

rich man who ignores the poor man at his doorstep, what he says about the priest and scribe who ignore the man beaten in a ditch, and how critical he is of the scribes and Pharisees who are quick to define who falls under God's judgment and who doesn't.

Only a faulty understanding of God can underwrite the unfortunate notion that being crushed in life constitutes despair.







*"Dear young people, do not bury your talents, the gifts that God has given you! Do not be afraid to dream great things."*

- Pope Francis

**We are all ministers of the Mercy of God**

For more information on becoming an Oblate Priest or Brother please contact:



Fr. Leo Philomin, OMI, The Presbytery,  
Darndale, Dublin 17.  
[l.philomin@oblates.ie](mailto:l.philomin@oblates.ie)

Fr. John Mc Fadden, OMI,  
Sacred Heart Church, Quex Road, London, NW6 4PS  
[j.mcfadden@oblates.co.uk](mailto:j.mcfadden@oblates.co.uk)

[www.oblatevocations.com](http://www.oblatevocations.com)

# The Muslim who saved the Church

Enrique Vaquerizo shares the incredible story of the man who saved the last Catholic Church in Dakhla (Sahara) Our Lady of Mount Carmel from destruction. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate have been serving there since 1954.

The traces of the Spanish occupation in the Sahara have almost completely disappeared, but in the area of Western Sahara the signs of the Iberian presence can still be found in what was once called Villa Cisneros, now more commonly known as Dakhla.

While in the last century it was still a city that housed a flourishing Spanish citadel, today of the colonial past only retains the manholes and the church. The building can now be visited thanks to Semlali Mohamed Fadel. Although Muslim, you can meet him on Sundays while crossing the aisles of the church in his wheelchair. Sahrawi, Muslim, disabled, Semlali Mohamed Fadel, known as “Bouh”, knows and talks about the church as if it were a tourist guide. Born in 1965 and the son of a Sahrawi soldier linked to the Spanish army, he was sent to Spain at the age of four after contracting polio. He spent six years in Las Palmas with the brothers of San Juan de Dios and decided to return to Sahara in 1982, but it took little to realize that Villa Cisneros as he knew it no longer existed. After the withdrawal of the European colonial powers from North Africa, in fact, the territory of Western Sahara was occupied initially by Mauritania and then by Morocco.

Bouh, who embodies both the Spanish and Sahrawi identities, and after growing up in a Catholic reality, found himself in a country that he did not feel was his own. “I didn’t know much about Islam, I had forgotten how to speak Arabic... In Las Palmas I went to mass



but I didn’t take communion, I was in church but everyone knew that I was a Muslim and they respected me. On my return I suddenly became a stranger”.

Bouh sought refuge in a place that could be familiar to him, but once he arrived at the church of Nuestra Señora del Carmen he found it closed and occupied by soldiers. The Moroccan army in fact began to use it as its headquarters after the Spanish retreat. “When the Spaniards left, the Christian community of the city disappeared with them. In the years following the occupation there were no more than 5 or 6 Spaniards. The Moroccans did not leave anything here that recalled ‘Spain’.

Father Luis Ignacio ROIS, one of the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate in Dakhla, also remembers those times. “In 1975 everyone left, only the missionaries remained, they remained out of friendship with the Sahrawis and because the Vatican asked us to stay. The Moroccans occupied the church for several years to put pressure on them”.



Mohamed Fadel



Although the Spanish buildings had already been in ruins for some time, and against UNESCO recommendations, in 2004 the government of Rabat decided to eliminate even the last vestiges of the colonial past by destroying a Spanish fort of the nineteenth century, the oldest building in Western Sahara. If Bouh had not intervened, the same fate would have happened to the church of the former Spanish enclave of Villa Cisneros. At the sight of the soldiers who were about to destroy the sacred building and had already demolished the rear, a neighbour went to call Bouh, who stood between the church and the digger. “The military told me that (the church) was useless, abandoned and would fall... Plus it was a Christian place and they were Muslims. I answered that no, it was ours, it belonged to the Sahrawi people and no one could touch it. I ran to call my neighbours and we didn’t move until the governor arrived”.

From that moment on Bouh promoted a campaign of social unrest, tried to contact the Apostolic Prefect, the authorities of El Aaiùn and the Vatican, until the governor of Dakhla agreed to leave the church. In return, he asked for an end to the protests about the back that had already been destroyed, and now Nuestra Señora del Carmen stands as the only testimony to a bygone era.

Many people now attend the church, such as Pierre André Sené, a native of Senegal. As soon as he crossed the Moroccan border he looked for a Catholic sanctuary but could not find one. It was thanks to the cross around his neck that an old Sahrawi indicated the direction for the church of Nuestra Señora del Carmen. The first time he attended the mass there were only two French tourists, so Pierre began to invite the other migrants to join him. Today Pierre is responsible for the projects developed by the Catholic Mission in union with Caritas in favor of migrants. “The migrant who arrives does not know anyone, has no accommodation or money after months of travel. Here we accompany them and help them with medical assistance.”

Father Luis Ignacio Rois assures us that the migration has reinvigorated the Catholic community of Dakhla and tells us how many migrants, once they have made the decision to cross the Mediterranean, go to him and ask him for a blessing.

– Originally published on omiworld and in the Spanish online newspaper El Confidencial

## Our Environment: Hope from the Margins

**Saturday 6 July Kimmage Manor, Whitehall Road, Dublin 12**

As we gather in Circles of Hope we will be encouraged and inspired by Nellie McLaughlin, passionate about our beloved earth and its future.

Sr. Nellie is from Donegal and a member of the Sisters of Mercy, Northern Province. She works in the areas of Creation Spirituality, Cosmology Ecology and Sustainable Living. She is a Co-founder of the Green Sod Land Trust. Author of ‘Out of Wonder’ and ‘Life’s Delicate Balance’

– a response to Pope Francis’ ‘Laudate Si.’

Musical Finale:  
the irresistible ‘Resistance Choir.’

**Registration: 9.30am**  
**Workshop: 10am – 4.30pm**

RSVP: Partners In Faith, c/o Sophia Housing Association,  
25 Cork Street, Dublin 8. Tel: 01 453 5348

Mobile: 087 2077 458 Email: [info@partnersinfaith.ie](mailto:info@partnersinfaith.ie)

Website: [www.partnersinfaith.ie](http://www.partnersinfaith.ie)

**Suggested Donation: €30** **Students: €10**  
**Includes tea & coffee, please bring your own lunch.**





# “Ti Aspetto Fuori” - I wait for you outside

**Fr Eduardo currently ministers as part of the Bluebell – Inchicore Pastoral Area team in Dublin. In this short article he shares with us his experience of taking part in a Youth Mission in Italy.**



“Ti aspetto fuori” (I wait for you outside) - this was the motto of the popular youth mission that took place from 22-30th of March in Santa Maria a Vico, in the province of Caserta, Italy.

Santa Maria a Vico, is a small town where the Oblates of the Mediterranean Province started their first community in Italy. It is a vibrant community, with a missionary identity and that is reflected in this mission week.

At the heart of the mission is the aim to meet the young people where they are at: schools, bus stops, public squares, bars, sports fields. The objective of the mission was to meet and share our missionary experience through dialogue and some prayer meetings in some of the town's public squares.

Without saying anything, we met every afternoon to sing and pray in one of the public squares of the town; others, seeing what was happening, just came and joined us.

During this week of popular mission, I discovered that young people are seeking to encounter the Lord in a genuine and different way; in their daily life, in a way that can touch their lives. Young people seek to have an authentic encounter with the Lord that will launch them into a transforming experience.

I was impressed by so many testimonies of young people who have found in Jesus the reason of their lives. After meeting with Jesus, they have seriously committed themselves to the Oblate missions, and some of them have spent a whole year on mission in Oblates centres of mission around the world.

This missionary experience brought me back to the moment when I decided to become an Oblate. It was after a popular mission experience that I discovered that the Lord was calling me to dedicate my whole life to the service of the most abandoned.

I am convinced, personally, that when we have an encounter with the Lord in the mission, we will be able to commit ourselves to work in his vineyard. I saw so many young people with a restless heart to discover the Risen Lord in their lives.

As Oblates, we are making an interprovincial collaborative effort when it comes to working with young people. This experience of popular mission is an example of this attempt to work together and enrich each other.



Finally, I would like to quote the call of the 36th Oblate General Chapter with regard to the mission with youth: “The missionary heritage we have received from Saint Eugene clearly puts youth at the centre of our call to mission. As in our Founder’s time, so too today their situation cries out for an urgent response and invites us to discover new ways to accompany them with the Good News of Jesus Christ” (...) “Just as in our Founder’s time, so now today, we recognize that mission with youth and for youth is a priority because in the young people today we identify one of the new faces of the poor. This must be a real priority, and we want to re-affirm it as an authentic Oblate mission”.

And more recently, Pope Francis in his letter to the Church following the Synod on Youth reinforces our mission to engage with young people and help

them to encounter Jesus and bring that experience through mission to others:

“If we can hear what the Spirit is saying to us, we have to realise that youth ministry is always missionary. Young people are greatly enriched when they overcome their reticence and dare to visit homes, and in this way make contact with people’s lives. They learn how to look beyond their family and their group of friends, and they gain a broader vision of life. At the same time, their faith and their sense of being part of the Church grow stronger. Youth missions, which usually take place during school holidays after a period of preparation, can lead to a renewed experience of faith and even serious thoughts about a vocation”

Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* 240  
– Eduardo Nunez-Yepe OMI

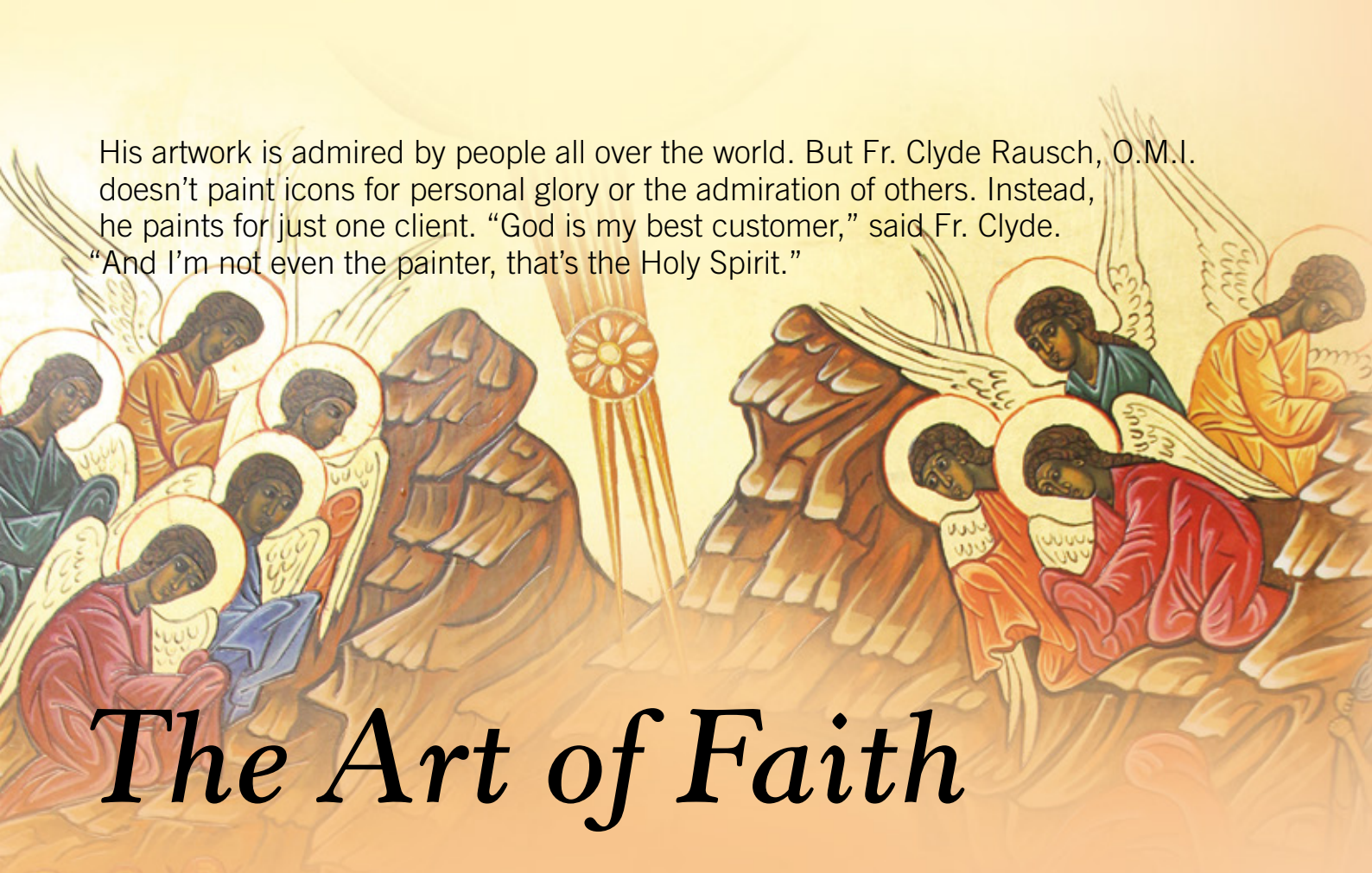
## Subscribe to the Oblate Pools and Support the Oblate Missions

### Weekly prizes of €300 and €150

For the past 40 years the Oblate Pools has been raising funds for the Oblate Missions overseas. The subscription for the year is €30/£25. Each subscriber receives a unique code and every Saturday the draw for the winners takes place. The winners are picked based on the results of Football matches in winter and of race meetings throughout the summer. To purchase an annual subscription please email Barbara Hogan at: [mamioblate@eircom.net](mailto:mamioblate@eircom.net) or write to The Mission Office, House of Retreat, Tyrconnell Road, Inchicore, Dublin 8, Ireland.

**You can also subscribe online: [www.oblates.ie](http://www.oblates.ie)**  
**All proceeds from the Oblate Pools is used to support the work of the Oblate Mission throughout the world.**





His artwork is admired by people all over the world. But Fr. Clyde Rausch, O.M.I. doesn't paint icons for personal glory or the admiration of others. Instead, he paints for just one client. "God is my best customer," said Fr. Clyde. "And I'm not even the painter, that's the Holy Spirit."

# *The Art of Faith*

Since the 1980s Fr. Clyde has been painting (often referred to as writing) icons that now grace churches, retreat houses, seminaries and other sacred places throughout Europe and the United States. He developed his artistic skills as a missionary priest in Sweden, and continues his work today in his studio at Oblate Renewal Center in San Antonio, Texas.

Becoming an internationally-acclaimed iconographer was a ministry that Fr. Clyde never expected. In fact, he didn't become serious about art until he was in his mid-40s. His previous painting experience involved walls, barns and some occasional sketching. Father Clyde was born in South Dakota USA and grew up on a farm. While in high school he began experiencing a calling to the priesthood and started corresponding with the Oblates who ran parishes about 20 miles away. Father Clyde said what first struck him about the Oblates was that they didn't send him generic form letters. Instead, he received personal letters about his possible vocation. Those personal letters eventually led him to join the Oblate community and he was ordained in 1968. Father Clyde's first assignment was looking like missionary in the Oblates newly-open missions in Brazil. But Fr. Clyde's allergies and the hot tropical weather created second thoughts for his superiors. Instead of Brazil, he was sent to a much different new Oblate mission – Sweden. It would be his home for the next 29 years.

Much of Fr. Clyde's time in Sweden was spent at a parish in the city of Taby near Stockholm. In addition to parish ministry, he also ministered at area hospitals and prisons. He found the people to be tough and resilient, like modern day Vikings. For two years, Fr. Clyde ministered at an Oblate mission in the northern part of the country, just 100 miles from the Arctic Circle. At that time he met Oblate Bro. Olof Åsblom, an accomplished iconographer. Father Clyde found Bro. Olof's serene religious icons fascinating, and especially appropriate for the quiet and reserved nature of the Swedes.

With the help of Bro. Olof, Fr. Clyde began to develop his icon painting skills. He discovered that an iconographer is not just a painter but also a writer, someone that tells a story through the artwork. "It's not something that you can just sit down and start to paint," explains Fr. Clyde. "You have to do your homework, read the Scripture, study and pray before you start. You have to create a relationship with the subject you are going to paint."

Sometimes Fr. Clyde can complete an icon in as little as a few weeks. Other icons can take years to finish. Father Clyde said a good iconographer can't force the timeline. Occasionally he gets "writers' block" and has to set an icon aside for several months. God will let him know when it's time to restart.

Father Clyde also explains that icons are not just representations of events in the Bible. They are works of art full of symbolism. The people in the icons are painted looking serene, portrayed as saints in Heaven. Even the frame is symbolic, representing the border between Heaven (the picture) and earth (outside the frame). Frequently Fr. Clyde paints outside of the picture and onto the frame, showing the connection between present and past.

“The picture will pull you into it, or it will come out to you,” Fr. Clyde explains. In addition to painting icons, Fr. Clyde also began teaching classes in the art form while in Sweden. Over the years he instructed hundreds of students to paint icons using their head and heart. The classes were truly ecumenical as most of the students were not Catholic.

In 2013 Fr. Clyde’s decided to return to the United States, finding a home with the Oblates in San Antonio. Most days he can be found in his studio working on icons or teaching the art form to students two days a week. When a person expresses interest in taking a class, Fr. Clyde never asks them if they have any artistic talent. Instead, he chooses students who have a deep faith and want to express that faith to others. “Jesus doesn’t pick us because of our talent, he picks us because he loves us,” said Fr. Clyde.

In Fr. Clyde’s classes, students use the same technique as iconographers from centuries earlier. No detail is too small, from the type of hair on the brushes to the wood used for the icon. Father Clyde and his students also make their own paint, through a combination of coloured pigments, egg yolk and water.



While the painting process might be precise, the actual artwork does not have to be perfect. The lines can be crooked and the body parts don’t have to look exactly right. Father Clyde reminds his students to not sweat the details. If something doesn’t look right, or the spirit moves you in a different direction, just paint over the old and start something new.

While Fr. Clyde appreciates the acknowledgement of his artistic skills, he prefers people look past the picture and into the true meaning of the art. It’s not about painting; it’s about discovering a deeper understanding of one’s faith. “This is my main form of prayer right now,” said Fr. Clyde. “When I go to the studio I don’t go there to paint, I go there to pray using a paintbrush.

– First published in Oblate World





# *You cannot evangelise a culture you don't love*

**We sat down with Fr Dominick Zwierzychowski OMI, who will be joining the Oblate mission in Britain and Ireland later this year. Fr. Dominick is 27 years old and he was ordained to the priesthood in 2018. He was born in a small town called Grodzisk in the west of Poland (near Poznan) and at present he is engaged in youth ministry in his native Poland. Two years ago he visited the Oblate mission here for the first time and was recently appointed to permanently join the mission in Britain and Ireland.**

## **Can you tell us about what it was like coming from Poland to London?**

One of the very first words I learned in English was the word “enjoy”. Years later, when I arrived in the UK for the first time as an Oblate, I heard it over and over, right from the very beginning of my stay. ‘Did you enjoy your flight?’ That was the first question I was asked when I landed at the airport!

The Oblates in London received me as their own brother. I felt very much accepted into the community, right into both the ups and down of community life! I was given so many great opportunities to preach about vocations every weekend in our parishes. I shared the story of my own vocation, as well as the importance of our responsibility for new missions.

I was assigned to work in pastoral practice at the Sacred Heart parish in London where I preached, baptised and helped Oblates in the ways I could.

Both the lay people and the Oblates did their very best to help me feel supported and welcomed, and for that I am grateful. At the end of my experience, the Oblates from Quex Road organised three days of personal retreat for me in Crewe. That was the best gift they could have given to me – this valuable time spent at the Retreat Centre helped me to really assess and look back on my stay in the UK. These experiences and time of recollection confirmed for me that I really wanted to join the mission in the



Anglo-Irish Province. It has been two years since my time in the UK, and looking back, I have to say, I truly did enjoy my time when I met the Anglo-Irish Oblates and worked with them for the very first time.

## **Why did you decide to join the Mission in Britain and Ireland?**

Firstly, because I am honestly convinced that it is my generation which is responsible for the future of the Congregation and our Province; remembering how so many Oblates of older generations who so selflessly gave their youth for the work of missions. Their example inspires me and hopefully others to follow in their footsteps. I also have memories of many people who personally asked me each Sunday after mass: “Please come back to us!”, “We need you!”, and “We will pray that you will come back”.



Fr Dominick Zwierzychowski, OMI

Another reason, which is so essential for me, is an ideal that was expressed many times by my personal hero, Cardinal Francis George OMI, the late Archbishop of Chicago. His principal project was the evangelisation of the culture. He said several times in an interview with Bishop Robert Barron (the founder of the Word on Fire Institute, a multi-media project which seeks to evangelise and answer questions on our faith): “You cannot evangelise a culture you don’t love!” What wise words! What a simple and easy way to enable you to enjoy your mission; both the joys and worries that being on mission creates.

### **What is like to go out on Mission to a new country as an Oblate?**

If somebody were to ask me what does it feel like to be an Oblate Missionary coming to this province, I would answer “It’s simple and easy”! It’s simple as long as you love the Lord and the tasks he gives to you. It’s simple as long as you love the people you serve. It’s simple as long as you love the place you live.

### **What about worries?**

Well, who lives without them? In his youth Francis George was not accepted by the local seminary because he had suffered from polio. But he never gave up. He found a different route to priesthood, which was through our Congregation. And Saint Eugene de Mazenod? The same. So many worries he had also; his broken family and an uncertain future. But both of these men surmounted their worries through their love for the people and places they served.

### **What’s next for you?**

I am looking forward with great joy to my new mission with all my heart. As you know, Father General Louis Lougen OMI appointed me as a member of the Anglo-Irish Province from the beginning of September this year. After one year of pastoral practice in my native Province in Poland, I’ve learned so much. For the past year, I was a part-time catechesis teacher at the Technical College. At the same time, for last few years, I was a parish chaplain for youth, for confirmation classes, and a Bible study group. However, one of my chief interests is the “New Evangelisation”. Some of the major figures that have influenced me, and who I continually go to for their wisdom and teachings, are Pope St John Paul II, Archbishop Fulton Sheen, Cardinal Francis George and Bishop Robert Barron. All of them are advocates of seeking new ways to connect with many people; “to rekindle the flame that has all but died in the hearts of many” as St. Eugene wrote in the Preface to our Constitutions and Rules. As am I! Twitter, Facebook and any other tools we can use are essential to reach out, even if it is just one seed, to fall on one person to help them to realise that they are loved by God.

### **What does it mean to work on the new ways of evangelisation?**

Firstly, it is to understand what you yourself believe, and secondly, to try and bring this faith and knowledge out into the world and to know how to share it with happiness. That first question comes to my mind many times while writing this article – “Did you enjoy yourself?” Ask yourself: do you derive joy and cheerfulness from what you do now? Do you get any enjoyment from your current mission? Perhaps sometimes you are overwhelmed by your work and commitments? Let’s rethink that. Let’s “rekindle the flame that has all but died in the hearts of many”. Let’s enjoy our mission.

– Fr Dominick Zwierzychowski OMI

# Discovering Father Con Scollen 1841-1902

– From the Archives



In this article Fr Mike Hughes helps introduce us to the story of Fr. Con Scollen. This brief introduction draws on an increasing number of sources such as writings by Ian Fletcher, Harry Winter and Johnathon Ryan all of which tell us of the renewed interest in the story of this Oblate missionary. So who was he?

His mother died in the Great Famine in Ireland. His family emigrated to the coalmining area of Durham in the north of England and he went on to become an Oblate lay brother, living among the Blackfoot, Cree and Métis peoples on the Canadian Prairies and in northern Montana in the United States. He made a significant contribution to the study of the First Nation languages, and much more.... Yet he is little known among us.

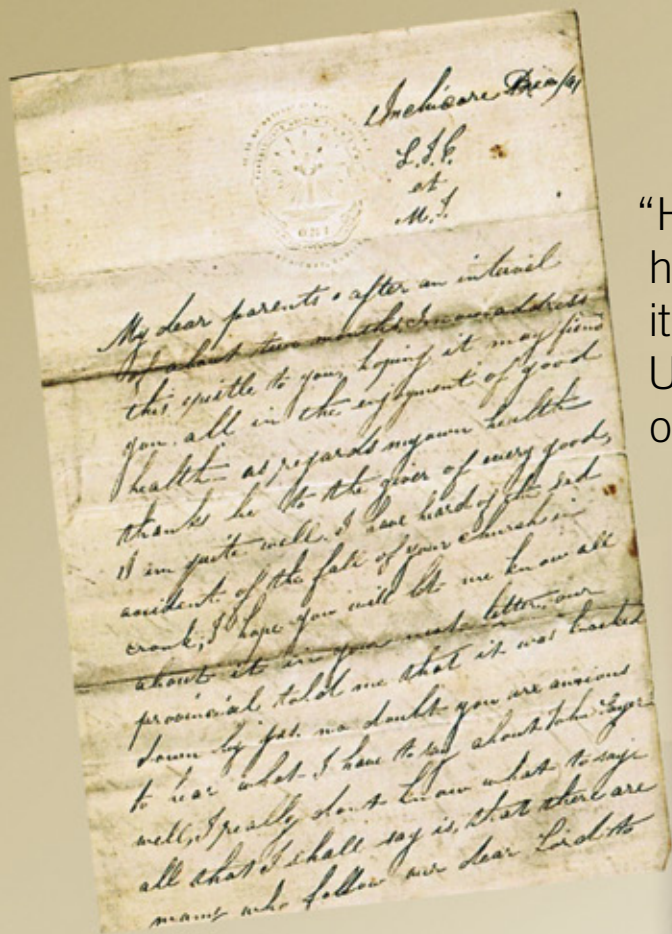
He followed two of his friends and joined the Oblates in Sicklinghall, near Leeds in Yorkshire, on 14 August 1860. A momentous opportunity came to go with Oblate Archbishop Taché of St. Boniface to Canada. Con wrote: "For a long time I have prayed to my dear Mother Mary, that She would grant me an opportunity of going to the Foreign Missions. When Doctor Taché came here, I thought my prayer was granted. So accordingly I asked him to take me with him to North America".

So the great adventure of his life started! "Scollen travelled to Fort Edmonton where, as a lay brother, he was immediately assigned the task of opening a school. He became devoted to his work and was praised by his superiors for his efforts. 'The more I teach these poor little children', he wrote, 'the greater love I feel for them and the greater is my desire to see them advance rapidly in their studies. My pupils are 30 in number.'"

What kind of a missionary was he? "Johnathon Ryan during his long interview in 2017 with Marvin Yellowbird, one of the Samson Cree chiefs, was urged by Yellowbird to learn about Scollen as a model of positive influence by the white man. Scollen 'displayed no interest in converting them into 'good subjects of the Crown,' as he would say sarcastically in many of his letters. Scollen saw exactly what that meant in his native Ireland."

His main biographer, Ian Fletcher, states "he had an extraordinary talent for languages and became the foremost linguist in the Oblates in Canada" Con plunged into the study of the Cree and other Indian languages: *I said I had to learn the Indian languages in order to instruct the Indians. The missionary who attempts to convert Indians through an interpreter or by trying to teach them his language, or by spreading bibles and pamphlets broad-cast among them, as I have known some evangelical societies to do, is simply losing his time, and is guilty of an imposition.*

His first years on the mission were as a lay brother. For the sake of his mission he was ordained in 1873. Throughout his ministry he was by the side of his people. During the mid-1870s, he saw the plight of the First Nations people of Alberta. He watched the bison disappear, hunted to near-extinction by those pouring into the West. Knowing how much the Plains tribes depended on the animal for their food, Scollen believed starvation was a real possibility for his friends.



“History is the complicated story of the human race, and often we try to make it fit the narrative we force on the world. Usually it’s because we want to make ourselves look better than our ancestors”



Marvin Yellowbird, a Samson Cree Chief

This realization helped him agree to aid the Canadian government as it sought to make treaties with the First Nations tribes. After the treaties were signed, however, the tribes were sent to reservations. When Scollen visited each reserve, he saw the Canadian government wasn’t keeping its promises. The Indian agents often refused to let the tribes farm or take other steps to improve their situations.

Rumors were circulated that Con was drinking and acting erratically. His enemies among the Canadian officials wrote to Bishop Vital J. Grandin of St. Albert and to Oblate leaders to accuse him of “gross immorality with Indian women.” The outcry prompted Grandin to recall Scollen for an investigation into his activities. But Scollen was difficult to locate; he was eventually discovered among the Blackfoot tribe in Montana, ministering to them while they hunted bison. After a lengthy investigation, the bishop absolved Scollen of all charges.

Conditions among the Cree were getting progressively worse. The government-appointed Indian agent of the Bear Hill Cree ruled them with an iron fist. Eight chiefs approached Scollen to write a letter for them to the Edmonton Bulletin to beg for help — a letter that was published February 3, 1883, reading in part:

*We are reduced to the lowest stage of poverty. We were once a proud and independent people and now we are mendicants at the door of every white man in the country; and were it not for the charity of the white settlers who are not bound by treaty to help us, we should all die on government fare. Our widows and old people are getting the barest pittance, just enough to keep body and soul together, and there have been cases in which body and soul have refused to stay together on such allowances. Our young women are reduced by starvation to become prostitutes to the white man for a living, a thing unheard of before, amongst ourselves and always punishable by Indian law. What then are we to do? Shall we not be listened to?*

The Canadian government responded to Scollen’s defiance with abuse and threats. William Anderson, the Crown’s Indian Agent, wrote to Bishop Grandin, asking him to “compel the Reverend Mr. Scollen to cease making trouble among the Indians or leave this District or that I should be compelled to have him arrested.” The bishop, for his part, refused to have Scollen removed. Instead, the pair continued to appeal to the Canadian government to fix the problem.

Scollen's position on his First Nation friends showed the prophetic nature of his insights:

*First and foremost, I wish the reader to bear in mind that the Indian is the only real American on this continent. We hear a great deal every day about foreigners, &c., coming to America. The first is, all white men and all black men throughout this whole American commonwealth, are comparatively nothing but foreigners. The pure Indian, the unmixed red man, and he alone, is the native, the aboriginal American. All others are either Europeans, Asiatics or Africans, and have been transplanted to this American soil... The red man, and he alone, is the native child and primitive possessor thereof the land.*

Scollen wrote these lines in 1893 to newspaper readers who would have scorned his views. Not only was he recognizing Indians as fellow human beings, he also affirmed their claim to the land. Although he did want the First Nations people to be Catholics, he didn't want them to eradicate their culture. Scollen's respect for those he ministered to shows through clearly in the essential element he chose that would preserve Native American culture in the coming generations: their languages.

Today a variety of sources are reviving his memory. Fortunately a Canadian archive holds a treasure trove

of correspondence which can be consulted on-line. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Glenbow Archive. While the book 'Thirty Years among the Indians of the Northwest. The personal experiences of Father Constantine Scollen', edited by Ian M. Wilson, is available on Kindle.

In this dip into a highly complex subject we have drawn on freely on these and other sources and recommend them to our readers who wish to go deeper. As Jonathon Ryan notes, "History is the complicated story of the human race, and often we try to make it fit the narrative we force on the world. Usually it's because we want to make ourselves look better than our ancestors. And we mumble half-thought-out apologies for the past without really reflecting on the needs of the present, thinking that will somehow fix everything. In truth, history is complex because humans are complex." (The residential schools were instituted by the Canadian government in conjunction with Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church during the 19th and 20th centuries) The Catholic Church in Canada operated some of the residential schools but also fought hard against the Canadian government for First Nations rights. We want our stories neat and tidy, with the good and bad guys clearly defined. But, often, they can be the very same person, and it might be us."

## Summer Camp 2019



**July 29th - August 2nd 2019**

This year, why not give your child a Summer Holiday with a difference?

Young people from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, aged 12-14, will come together for 5 days of outdoor activities and teambuilding, with time for reflection and prayer each evening. The camp will take place in Lilliput OEC, near Mullingar Ireland. Chaperoned transport will be provided from Edinburgh, London and Dublin. Centre staff are fully trained, and all staff and volunteers will be Garda Vetting/DBS certified. The subsidised cost of the camp includes all travel, meals, accommodation and equipment hire.

**The cost of the camp is £225 / €225**

**For more information about the camp, contact:**

### IRELAND

Padraig Corcoran  
St Michael's Inchicore,  
52A Bulfin Rd, Inchicore, Dublin 8  
Mobile: +353 (0)87 7723255  
Email: padraig.oblate.partners@gmail.com

### BRITAIN

Ronan Lavery,  
Oblate Partners in Mission Office,  
Denis Hurley House,  
14 Quex Road London NW6 4PL.  
Tel: 020-7624-7296  
Email: lavery.ronan@googlemail.com

**Bookings now  
being taken  
for Summer  
2019**



# Crewe Events

## Art and Prayer

Monday 8th (supper) – Friday 12th (lunch)  
July 2019

– Presenter Sheila Gosney RJM

A spiritual/prayerful experience of deepening and discovering the joy of creativity in finding Christ anew more deeply intimate within our spiritual journey. Looking with the inner eyes of wisdom, living our lives to the full through prayerful creative experiences.

Suitable for all – no art experience necessary. Bring basic art materials: colouring pencils; felt pens; soft chalks; oil pastels & paints, scissors, glue, masking fluid, notebook, book for journaling and watercolour paper

Sr. Sheila Gosney is a Professional Artist. She holds a Doctorate in Education and a Masters in Creative Education. She is a trained Spiritual Director. She works in the creative retreat ministry and runs workshops in the creative arts.

**Cost: £340 Per Person, £20 Deposit**

## Discovering The Mystics Through Contemplative Creativity - “Julian of Norwich”

Saturday, 13 July  
Led by Shelia Gosney RJM & Joan Brown SND

**Cost: £25, Includes a Light Lunch**

**For information on these and our other events  
please contact the Oblate Team at**

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

**Tel:** +44 (0) 1270 568 653  
or **E-mail:** [director@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk](mailto:director@oblateretreatcentre.org.uk)  
[www.orc-crewe.org](http://www.orc-crewe.org)

## Individually Guided Retreat

Saturday, 13 July to Monday, 22 July  
Wednesday, 21 August to Friday, 30 August

An Individually Guided Retreat is a very special experience providing the opportunity for a person to explore and deepen their personal relationship with God. An Individually Guided Retreat is undertaken in silence, a silence which allows the retreatant to find an inner stillness which better enables the person to hear God speak to them: “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

In this inner journey the retreatant is guided by a trained Spiritual Director. Each day the retreatant meets their director and is invited to share, in so far as they want to, their prayer experience. The director will suggest passages of Scripture which might help the retreatant in their personal journey with God.

**Cost: £475 Per Person, £20 Deposit**

## 6 Day Preached Retreat

Friday, 13 September to Friday, 20 September

The retreat will include reflective inputs each day, Eucharist, times of quiet prayer and times for gentle reflection. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can be celebrated by anyone who wishes to do so.

**Cost: £490 Per Person, £20 Deposit**



# Oblate Lourdes Pilgrimage

*Lourdes,  
a place of encounter;  
a place of healing;  
a place of peace.*

**14th-19th September**

**Packages Available From**  
*Dublin • London • Manchester • Edinburgh*

## **Our packages include:**

- Flights
- Airport Transfers
- Full Board accommodation for 5 nights

## **\*Assisted Pilgrims package also includes:**

- Medical team on all flights
- Full board at the Accueil Notre Dame (within the grounds of the Shrine)
- 24 hr medical care

IRELAND  
From  
**€669**

BRITAIN  
From  
**£569**

€10/£10  
Reduction  
if you book  
online

Assisted  
Pilgrims  
**€625**  
(DUBLIN)

Assisted  
Pilgrims  
**£475**  
(LONDON)



## **For further information:**

### **LONDON**

Noreen Keenan,  
T: 020 7624 1701 parishomiquex@gmail.com

### **MANCHESTER**

Kirk Jacob,  
T: 020 7624 7206 kirk.oblate.partners@googlemail.com

### **EDINBURGH**

Fr. Martin Moran, OMI or Kathy Barclay  
T: 0131 554 2482 info@stmarysstarofthesea.org

### **DUBLIN**

Fr. Vincent Mulligan, OMI or Barbara Hogan,  
T: 01 454 2888 mamioblate@eircom.net

**[www.OblateLourdesPilgrimage.com](http://www.OblateLourdesPilgrimage.com)**

If you would like to share your thoughts or ideas with us please contact: Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly OMI, Partners in Mission Office, Denis Hurley House, 14 Quex Road, London NW6 4PL or email [oblate\\_partners@btinternet.com](mailto:oblate_partners@btinternet.com)

[Return to Contents Page](#)



printed on paper from  
a sustainable source