

# Douai Oblate

December 2009 No 32

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## Oblates World Congress 2009

**T**he second Oblates World Congress was held in Rome, October 2 - 10, on the theme 'The religious challenges today - the Benedictine answer'. From all accounts it was a great success, due in large measure to the hard work of the organisers. Our delegate was Paula Holmes who gave a report during the weekend retreat Oct. 30 - Nov. 1. She had been due to report to the mid-week retreat Dec. 7 - 9, but unfortunately ill health had prevented her from attending, so she will give a report during the March retreat. Zina Neagle who had been the National Coordinator for Great Britain and Ireland, and Sr Benedict Gaughan of Minster who had been the spiritual accompanist reported to the meeting of the Oblate Directors at Ealing in November.

### Congress Papers

Two of the papers are now available on the Congress website <http://www.benedictine-oblates.org./2009/testi-en.php>

I strongly recommend every oblate to read these two papers, and I hope those oblates who do not have web access will find a fellow oblate will be willing to print off the papers for them. We shall probably be using them at future retreats. Other papers will be added in due course when translations have been completed, so keep an eye on the website.

### Contact

During the Congress the Abbot Primate, Notker Wolf, met with the national coordinators from each country to begin a discussion on various issues concerning oblates. He intends to write to all the abbots and abbesses to begin a consultation process. Among them was the question whether any structures should be put in place to enable oblates to have communication and liason with each other internationally. The response of the national coordinators was that a light flexible structure would be helpful, but centralisation was contrary to Benedictine principles.

### Oblate Formation

Another question was formation. Oblates need formation in Benedictine spirituality, both as novice oblates, but also ongoing formation. The feeling of the national coordinators was that it would be helpful to provide a general formation programme for new oblates, although some felt that it should be not so much a programme as a process. Deeper development was also needed for those who had been oblates for some time, and also a refresher programme for returning 'lapsed' oblates.

It was noted that many monasteries already have highly organised formation programmes, some of which are available on line, e.g. St Vincent's Archabbey <http://www.osb.org/sva/obl/pdf/OblateFormation.pdf>

and the Monastery of the Ascension <http://www.idahomonks.org/manual.htm>

At Douai we have, with permission, been using the St Meinrad programme, which you will all have received in the large loose leaf folders when you became novice oblates.

However we do need to consider whether we need to have more structured ongoing formation, and I would welcome your suggestions.

In this context the abbot primate spoke of a 'theology of oblation', this is a new concept and is one that needs developing.

## Oblates and Communities

Another question asked was how can oblates help monasteries and monasticism. The national coordinators suggested: assisting with manual labour or other work, giving time, assisting financially, praying for the community, building personal friendships with the community, all ideas which have been around for some time, but a new suggestion was oblates having a joint shared vision with the community.

## Keeping the memory alive

To keep the memory of the Congress alive and make sure it becomes of value to all oblates, it was suggested that the Congress talks be used as the basis of oblate retreats, and share ideas through the internet. It is proposed that the British oblates website be used for this purpose, it is important that we keep looking at it <http://www.benedictine-oblates.net>

During the Congress Abbot Notker made a strong statement about websites being the way forward and recommending that each nation should have an oblates website. Britain is one of the first, if not the first, nation to have such a website.

## Recession

The recession had had a severe affect on the Congress. Several of the intended participants from more distant countries had had to withdraw as they were unable to afford the costs of attending. In addition the level of support ser-

vices was greatly reduced. For example, whereas in 2005 there had been a shuttle service provided from the airport to the conference venue, this time there had been only a few scheduled coaches, which meant many delegates had long waits at the airport. In 2005 there had been a staff of 45 for 300 oblates, this time there were 10 for 210 oblates, who had come from 37 different countries.

## Next Congress

The next World Oblate Congress is scheduled for 2013, but the work of preparing needs to begin now. We need to begin immediately with the task of choosing a new National Coordinator and UK Oblates team. Zina Neagle intends to step down from March 31, 2010. She and the team have worked hard to ensure that everything went smoothly for the British and Irish delegates at this year's Congress. Volunteer oblates are required to manage and be responsible for specific roles within the team. The team members will need to be people who have sufficient spare time to perform the roles and to support themselves financially for, at the moment at least, there is no fund to finance this work.

Apart from the National Coordinator, who could also be the chairperson of the team, there is need for a secretary, treasurer and website manager. It is important that team members be willing to serve for a four year period until just after the next Congress. It is essential that they be people who can work together as a team.

A great deal of the pioneering work has been done by the previous team, procedures have been established, the bank account set up, so the new team will be able to take over with the organisation in good working order.

The fact that the British delegation to this year's congress found everything working smoothly for them, was in no small measure due to the hard work and efficiency of the National Coordinator and the team. Not all the delegations from other nations had such an easy time. ◇

## Oblates

### Prayers

Please pray for Deacon Peter Lattey of Fleet in Hampshire who died suddenly at the end of October. Peter had been ill for some time, and had been unable to drive which prevented his coming to Douai recently, although in the past he had been a faithful participant at retreats. His health had been improving, which made his sudden death quite unexpected.

Also for the following who are sick or who have asked for our prayers:

Dan and Helen O'Connor  
Nicky Bede Dillon  
Paula Holmes  
Zina Neagle  
Neil Pearson

### Novices

Janine Turner became a novice oblate on October 12 and Neil Pearson on November 9, both at Douai during a Faringdon Chapter meeting.

### Oblation

Kevan Browne made oblation at St Wolstan's church, Costessy, Norwich, on October 8 during a meeting of the Julian Chapter.

Anne Theresa Ishikawa, Klara and Thomas (Franz) Brunnhuber made oblation at Conventual Mass at Douai on October 31 during a retreat.

### Michael Casey OCSO

Several of our oblates attended a day given by Michael Casey on *lectio divina* as part of the 75th anniversary celebrations of Worth Abbey in July. Fr Michael is a monk of Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia, and author of 'Sacred Reading - The Ancient Art of *Lectio Divina*'. (Liguori/Triumph Missouri).

Anne Ishikawa wrote:

Fr Michael made ten good points on *lectio divina*.

1 Regularity leads to stability, the more we pray regularly the more God will speak to us

thereby making our faith deeper.

2. Time. We have to make time, it isn't given to us!

3. The place has to be quiet, harmonious, temperate and dedicated. It has to be conducive to prayer so as to allow a deep sense of prayer to develop.

4. The readings must be sustaining and attention grabbing.

5. Vocalising the readings can help deepen our understanding of them.

6. Read a whole book at a time; this leads to a knowledge of the context that passages are set in, which may lead to a better understanding of more difficult passages.

7. Allow yourself to be puzzled by the passages - how often have I given up just because the passage challenged me too much or I could not work out what it was trying to say to me!

8. Actively seek the meaning of the text.

9. Read the text closely and attentively.

10. Connect with the passage and the people involved.

If we can apply all these points in our praying of *lectio* I am sure it would put us in a right place with God.

During his talk it struck me that our personal history and our gender can affect our view on the particular passage, which made me see that *lectio* should be both an individual exercise and a corporate one too.

His talk on monastic theology made me realise one needs to be proactive in prayer which will in turn allow God to speak. God formed us, and allows to be reformed, leading to a deeper faith, which in turn leads to a transformation of our lives, that will bring self-knowledge, a simplicity of life and a deeper ability to love and forgive.

### Graduation

Congratulations to novice oblates Fodhla McGrane and Richard Guion who both re-

*continued at the foot of the next page.*

## News

### Meeting of Oblate Directors

The Oblate Directors met at Ealing Abbey on November 11. They received reports from Zina Neagle and Sr Benedict Gaughan on the Oblates World Congress, and discussed various issues arising. They fully supported the setting up of a new oblate team to prepare for the 2013 Congress.

They approved the suggestion that another pair of National Oblate Retreats be held, it is important that next time these not be held at Douai, as it would tend to look as if it were our endeavour. Another proposal was that there should be national Oblate Days. Sr Benedict offered to arrange one at Minster Abbey on Easter Saturday, April 10, 2010. With the new greatly improved train services Minster is easily reached from London St Pancras, so a day event there is easily possible for those living in the London area. You will be hearing more about this.

### Funding.

Until now the National Coordinator and the team have been entirely self-funded. This is clearly unfair as they are working on behalf of all the oblates. The Oblate Directors agreed that the Abbot Primate be approached to set up a means of funding.

### Website

In the meantime money is needed to keep the oblate website going, so it was agreed also that each Oblate Director should request oblates to make a small donation for this purpose, so if any of you would like to contribute to keeping this website going please send your donation to me and I will pass it on. Please make cheques out to 'UK Oblates Team'. The website had originally been set up with a generous large donation from Glenstal Abbey in Ireland. ◇

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*Gradation continued from the previous page.*

ceived MAs in Christian Spirituality from Heythrop College, University of London, in December, at the same ceremony as Br Christopher also received an MA ◇

## Retreats

We have been blessed in having our two recent retreats led by Sr Miriam McNulty and St Judith Leckie, the joint Oblate Directors of Turvey Abbey. They chose the theme of St Benedict's teaching in Chapter Seven, the steps of humility. The style of retreat was quite different from what we have been used to. The sisters made good use of Power Point presentation and the power of image. Several people expressed the hope that we should invite the sisters again on another occasion to give us another pair of retreats. We will all be looking forward to their next visit.

### Dates for 2010

The dates for retreats in 2010 are:

Mon 8 - Wed 10 March  
Fri 16 - Sun 18 April  
Fri 11 - Sun 13 June  
Tues 13 - Thurs 15 July  
Fri 29 - Sun 31 October  
Mon 13 - Wed 15 December

It is important that if you book for a retreat that you actually do turn up, or if you are unable to come through ill health or some good reason that you let us know. Simply not to arrive when you have booked is not acceptable. For our Pastoral Programme retreats we ask people to pay a deposit of £30 when they make a booking, and consequently very few fail to arrive, so please don't just not turn up. ◇

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*Realise that God dwells in you.*

*Accept the will of God.*

*Accept the legitimate authority of others.*

*Accept the natural circumstances of life.*

*Recognise the giftedness of your heritage.*

*Listen to one another with respect.*

*Stop using derisive language.*

*Discover the person God call you to be.*

From our retreat on St Benedict chapter 7. ◇

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